July/Aug 1984 Number 70

Space Gamer

The Magazine of Science Fiction Gaming

$3.00

TSR's Heroic Roleplaying Game

MARVEL SUPER HEROES™

Feature Review

ONE FROM THE H.A.R.T.

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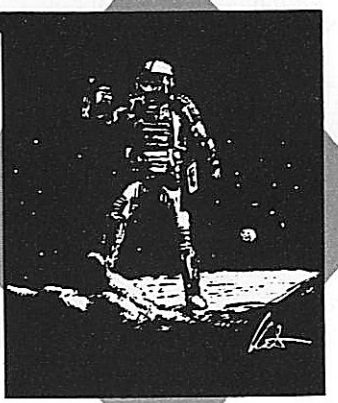

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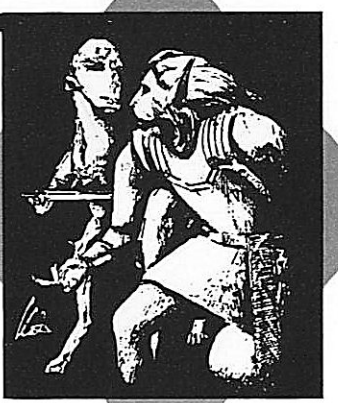

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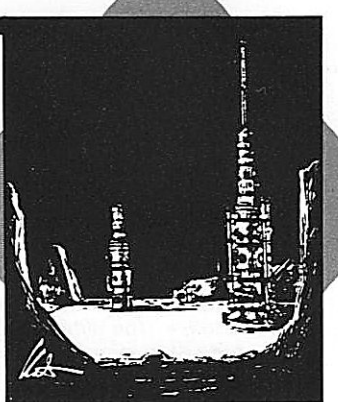

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MARVEL SUPER HEROES™

Review by Allen Varney

"The Marvel Universe is a strange and diverse place, reaching from the Microverses to the Kree Galaxy, from mid-town Manhattan to the Blue Area of the moon, and from shining, eternal Asgard to the Dark Dimension of Dormammu. This wondrous cosmos is the realm of the MARVEL SUPER HEROES campaign."

—from the Campaign Book

TSR's first superhero roleplaying game is also the first based on a major comic-book line, and among the first of a new generation of RPGs: introductory level, easy to learn and play, limited in scope. As you might expect, these points are both strengths and weaknesses in the final product, but considering its target audience of young novices, ***Marvel Super Heroes*** is a successful, if not actually superheroic, effort.

Like hordes of others, I've been visiting the Marvel Universe for a long time, and I harbor great affection for its characters and settings. Is Thor really as strong as the Hulk? Is Guardian's widow going to take over Alpha Flight? Will Johnny Storm *ever* find a steady girlfriend? These are matters of consuming interest to all those who have "made theirs Marvel."

TSR skillfully exploits this fascination in the ***Marvel Super Heroes*** rules: In an enticing conceit by writer Steve Winter, the characters themselves explain the game mechanics! It's cutesy, it's silly, sometimes it gets in the way of rules clarity . . . but for the hardcore Marvelite there is a positively electric thrill in learning about combat from Spider-Man and the Thing. And to be taught magic by the Sorcerer Supreme himself, Dr. Strange! — this strikes to the nerve. Irresistible.

So we're dealing with powerful conditioned responses here. Moving past these, what reaction does the game itself provoke?

Components

It's an impressive package. The box cover is atrocious, but inside is the 16-page Battle Book (essential beginning information plus the combat system), the 48-page Campaign Book — both of these with full-color covers — a large color map, a sheet of 25 backprinted, die-cut, 1¼" x 1" color counters, illustrated character cards for eight heroes, the 16-page introductory adventure "Day of the Octopus," and two ten-sided dice, plus one of those little wax crayons TSR thinks we use to gunk up the dice. All for $13.50 — a steal.

The twin rulebooks are copiously illustrated with new and reprint art by a slew of Marvel artists of widely varying abilities, from Kirby and Ditko down to Sal Buscema. The new art is poor but serviceable; given the dismal artwork in other superhero RPGs, even these mediocre illustrations set a new standard of sorts.

Rules

The box cover reads, "Ages 10 to Adult."

That cover blurb is of crucial importance to any consideration of ***Marvel Super Heroes***. The intended audience appears to be at the lower end of that scale, and designer Jeff Grubb and writer Steve Winter (credited, in true comic-book fashion, as "co-creators") have gone to heroic lengths to make orthodox RPG mechanics accessible to very young gamers. Their approach is worth examining; the salient features are as follows:

Quick starting. Everything in this game has been streamlined to allow a neophyte to be up and running an adventure quickly. The combat system has been extracted and presented in its own "Battle Book," which contains all you need to start slugging it out; eight pregenerated heroes are provided on cut-out character cards; the adventure scenario included can be played as a straight series of fight scenes, if you don't want to take time to learn the campaign rules.

This may be the wave of the future — and I'm all for it! Most roleplaying games have long since passed the point of diminishing returns, insofar as players and referee must digest huge volumes of material before they can even decide whether the system is worth pursuing. With TSR's method, which I take the liberty of christening the "jackrabbit" approach, Grubb and Winter allow buyers to gain almost immediate gratification playing their favorite heroes — or (it may be) decide much faster than usual that this isn't the game for them. This possibility brings us to point two:

Simple mechanics. This is the down side of the jackrabbit approach; ***Marvel Super Heroes*** allows easy entry to the comic-book universe only because the game procedures are stripped down and abstracted almost to the family-game level.

For starters, there are the conventional character attributes (Fighting, Agility, etc.); however, these are not implemented as continuous numerical ranges, but "ranked" in specific, graduated steps, from "Feeble" (Aunt May's Endurance) to "Amazing" (Reed Richards' Reason) and up to "Monstrous" (Daredevil's Intuition) and "Unearthly" (the Hulk's Strength, Dr. Strange's "Psyche"). A few privileged items and qualities, such as Captain America's indestructible shield and Thor's Uru hammer, are more or less lifted out of game terms altogether and given rare "Class 1000" status; this is an elegant way to handle such unbeatable absolutes as adamantium, say, or Galactus.

The rankings are given numerical values to use in calculating damage and so forth, so that if (for example) you punched someone with Incredible Fighting ability, the target would take 40 points of damage to his "Health Points." But usually the numbers are unnecessary; the game's whole approach is so rigidly structured that you can attempt virtually any action just by rolling percentile dice and consulting the column labelled "Remarkable" (or whichever rank is appropriate) on the table.

That's right, *the* table. The aptly-named "Universal Table" governs the entire ***Marvel Super Heroes*** game. Want to figure out that alien weapon using your Excellent Reason, or swoop down and land on someone with your Amazing Agility? Roll those ten-siders and cross-index the percentile result with the "Excellent" or "Amazing" column on the Universal Table. On a *white* result you failed, while the *green, yellow,* and *red* results (it's a colorful table) show how well you succeeded in your attempted FEAT. FEAT? Yes, your *F*unction of *E*xceptional *A*bility or *T*alent.

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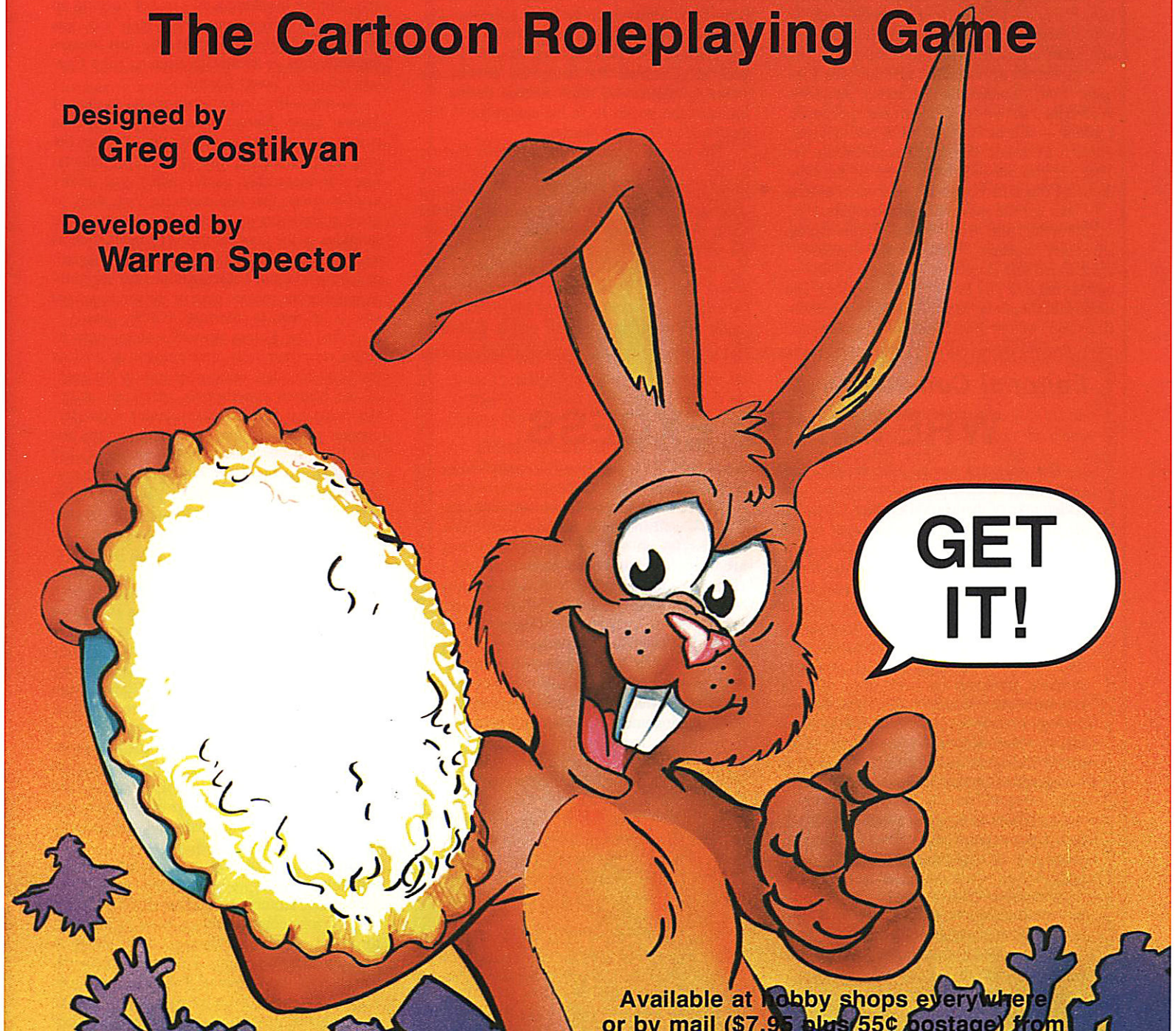

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Whenever you try to do anything extraordinary, you make a FEAT roll on the Table.

Sure, it's crude and simplistic, but it plays well. And you have to admire the guts and ingenuity it took to tie an entire game to exactly *one* chart. Spellcasting, reaction rolls, breaking things, standing trial — it's remarkable. (Incredible, amazing, monstrous?) This is not for the experienced gamer, but remember: "Ages 10 to Adult."

Limited scope. ***Marvel Super Heroes***' orientation toward children is clearly shown in its narrow focus and incomplete treatment. Attributes and powers are given for only eight Marvel heroes and five super-villains — and a motley lot they are too, but wait on that for now — while attributes (only) can be figured for several other characters from the examples.

The heroes provided are all right: the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Captain America, Wolverine, and — for demographic purposes, I guess — the new, female Captain Marvel. There is a counter, but no character listing, for Thor. If you wanted to play any of the hundreds of other heroes in the Marvel Universe . . . wait for the inevitable supplements.

Likewise, the five villains given in the adventure scenario, "Day of the Octopus," are a weird lot. Doctor Octopus, okay, fine — but the Beetle? The Fixer? The Scorpion? The bloody *Radioactive Man*? Where is the Hellfire Club, or the Red Skull, or Dormammu? Where is *Doctor Doom*, for crying out loud? He drops by in the Campaign Book to talk about villainous motivations, but if you wanted to pit your heroes against him . . . well, wait for the supplements. (And I know he's currently dead in the comics, but this game's relationship to the stories it represents is a whole other topic. See related story.)

The character generation system, tacked onto the end of the Campaign Book almost as an afterthought, is wholly inadequate. Character creation is a matter of either random percentile rolls, giving peculiar results, or simply picking and choosing whatever powers you want from the 60 brief descriptions, without regard to consistency or play balance. The power explanations are prefaced with this telling comment: "The explanation offers only general guidelines for using the power; the Judge [gamemaster] must further define the limits of the power to fit his campaign." The guidelines are pretty sparse.

The narrow range of ***Marvel Super Heroes*** is its principal weakness. An interesting (though moot) topic is whether this self-limiting approach was due *entirely* to greed — "sell the basic product cheap, then milk the kids with the supplements" — or whether some of it was due to design restrictions imposed by a high-power licensor. Perhaps Marvel doesn't want the character-creation system *too* extensive; it might not do to have lots of player-generated ersatz Marvel heroes running around. But this is mere speculation. Back to the game.

Points of Interest

For all its limitations, this design has some nice features. The section on playing your character in an extended campaign is particularly good: The system (described by Captain America) gives rewards not only for foiling global conspiracies and rescuing bystanders, but for getting together with friends, making charity appearances, and signing autographs. Similarly, your character is penalized not only for running from a fight or destroying property, but for breaking a date or not keeping up with school assignments. "Anybody who lets his personal life fall apart, or just misses appointments or avoids his friends," the Captain tells us, "loses Karma."

Karma is the "experience point" system of ***Marvel Super Heroes***. You can spend Karma points to improve your die rolls or, over the long term, purchase new powers or talents. They're incredibly useful when you really *need* to make that one die-roll; tying them to good roleplaying is a fine idea. Some of the wrinkles in the concept are very neat, such as losing *all* your Karma when you kill someone, or giving a villain a Karma bonus for carefully explaining his master plan or device to a hero who is helpless to interfere. (Gloat, gloat!)

I find the Karma reward system, with its stress on community involvement as well as thud-and-blunder, admirably true to the spirit of the Marvel superheroes. After all, didn't the company revolutionize comics a quarter-century ago through its examination of the private lives of the characters behind the masks? For other reasons, I don't think the Karma system goes far enough (see the "Bullpen Bulletins" feature), but this is the right approach, and Jeff Grubb is to be commended.

The "Building Things" rules are especially comic-booky. You spend "resource points" — collected weekly, in amounts which vary according to whether you're a struggling freelance photographer or the ruler of Latveria — to construct whatever you want. Just buy ability ranks for the attributes the item requires: A vehicle needs Body, Control, and Speed ranks; a robot needs all these plus Reason; weapons have just Range and Damage, and so on. Total the point cost for the attributes, add on costs for size modifiers (it costs more if it's pocket-sized or fills a room) — and that's it. The system is certainly playable, but game balance is obviously not the priority here. ("Ages 10 to Adult.")

The movement system is by area, and is foolishly simple — about one step above ***Monopoly***. Combat is a series of FEAT rolls, with various combat options (straight slugfest, throwing, dodging, charging) color-coded to provide differing results depending on the color rolled on the Universal Table. You can turn a missed roll into a hit by spending Karma to increase the die-roll — *after* you've rolled! Damage is done according to the number-value of the attribute rank (see above), and is subtracted from your "Health Points." When you lose all your Health, you're unconscious; sometimes you might actually die, but that is

TMTMTMT

really tough. If anybody takes a moment to "help" you (that's what it says), you won't die. This, too, is true to the Marvel Comics spirit.

The rest of the game systems are pretty sketchy. Professor X tells us to "practice" every week (or lose Karma), but procedures for practice are never detailed. Special Environments like outer space, the sea, Asgard, and the Negative Zone are barely mentioned. (Well, wait for the supplements.) Likewise the other races of Marvel-style humanity: Eternals, Deviants, and the Inhumans. Once more, these shortcomings invite speculation: Did Marvel, in its (presumed) rigid insistence on accuracy, require these fly-bys of interesting Marvel sites for the sake of completeness? Was it the other way around, and did they forbid further explication of these fascinating locales to avoid restricting their future story options? Is it time to go back to the review?

The "Government and the Law" section deserves mention. It describes the American legal system. It is just about one page long. Nonetheless, this is one page more than other superhero RPGs have bothered to give us, so good marks for Grubb and Winter here.

The adventure provided is not actually bad — apart from the oddball assortment of supervillains and a tendency toward *especially* mindless fight scenes. Doctor Octopus has constructed a giant "Octodroid" to destroy Manhattan. Apart from the purists' objections (this is not Doc Ock's style at all), the problem with the module is that it's for a distinctly odd team: Spider-Man, the Thing, Captain America, and Captain Marvel. These four don't exactly combine into a well-oiled fighting mechanism. But apart from that, this is of tolerable quality. (It's also fail-safe; whenever the characters are about to screw up badly, Thor flies in and rescues them, then flits off to Asgard again.) Need I add that further adventures are promised?

I've saved the zinger for last: The scale of battle. Combat takes place in "rounds." How long is a round? I quote:

"Each round is like one panel in a comic book. Keep that in mind when you play; if a hero can't do something in one panel in a comic book, he can't do it in one round in the game."

Your reaction to that idea will probably mirror your reaction to the entire ***Marvel Super Heroes*** game. Use it as the best gauge to determine whether the game is for you. My own opinion is that this is a respectable effort, and an excellent introductory game for a devoted Marvel fan aged 10 to 12; older, more experienced, or less devoted buyers will probably be disappointed. 'Nuff said.

***Marvel Super Heroes** (TSR, Inc.); $13.50. Designed by Jeff Grubb; written by Steve Winter. Two rulebooks, eight character cards, 21 ½ x 33" two-sided color map, 25 die-cut color counters, introductory adventure folder "Day of the Octopus," two ten-sided dice, and gunky wax crayon, boxed. For two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.* **SG**

BULLPENBULLETINSBULLPENBULLETINSBULLPENBULLET

ASCITITIOUS ANFRACTUOUS APPRAISALS AND ATRABILIOUS ANIMADVERSIONS APPURTENANT TO MERRY MARVEL'S MAGNIFICENT, MEGALOPHONOUS, MULTIFARIOUS MACROCOSM

This is for the True Believers in the audience, the *junkies*, the faithful followers of the House of Ideas who want to know the *hard* answers: Exactly how well does ***Marvel Super Heroes*** simulate the high-power hijinks of the superheroes we know and love?

ITEM! The time-frame is pre-*Secret Wars*. Spider-Man has his old costume; the Thing is still on Earth and still permanently the Thing. On the other hand, the mythos is fairly up-to-date to the point of *Secret Wars:* the Fantastic Four wear their new costumes, while Thor is shown in his Sigurd Jarlson secret identity and Stark International is now Stane International. (Iron Man is never described vis-a-vis Tony Stark or James Rhodes.) The New Mutants and Project Wideawake are mentioned briefly; Joe Robertson edits the *Daily Bugle*. It's clear that writer Steve Winter knows his comics.

ITEM! There are, of course, some omissions. The Marvel Universe has grown into such a screwball megalopolis of superhuman characters that only seriously disturbed people (i.e., comic fans) stay current on *all* of it. No mention is made of Spider-Man's romance with the Black Cat, or the FF's new secret identities. As mentioned in the review, Doctor Doom is apparently still alive; at least, he narrates a rules section and he's mentioned in the examples. (No sign of John Byrne's "new" Doctor Doom, of course.) But overall, these rules display admirable knowledge of Marvel minutiae.

ITEM! The meticulous background invites respect for the design, and the abstract approach that allows a "jackrabbit" start in playing the game likewise permits great flexibility of action. All the basic Marvel histrionics fit easily on the Universal Table. But the universality of that table also makes for a sameness of effect; whatever you do to the bad guy, it comes down to an attack which drains his "Health Points." As for violence levels equal to the comic source material — e.g., Ben Grimm punching Terrax and knocking him straight through, not one, but *two* entire skyscrapers — forget it. Game balance dictates a much lower level of effect; maximum knockback is just one area. Pretty pale in that respect.

ITEM! This brings up the idea that perhaps what makes the Marvel Universe so compelling simply cannot be captured in game terms. Cosmic battles are fine, but it's pretty much agreed that the character interaction — the soap opera, if you will — is what keeps readers coming back. Here is where the Karma point system (see "Points of Interest" in the review) shows weakness: Its approach is much too general. By harnessing all sorts of different heroes to the same reward/penalty system, ***Marvel Super Heroes*** minimizes the variation that makes them interesting. For instance, a Wolverine player *should* be *given* Karma, not lose it, for having his character kill people, because Wolverine is a homicidal maniac. But what the Karma system giveth (20 points for "good role-playing"), the Karma system taketh away (lose *all* Karma points for killing).

ITEM! What I'd like to see is customized Karma awards that reflect the characters' varying goals and attitudes. Why should Peter Parker be penalized for missing a date? Peter is a schlep! Does he *ever* make a date? Give him Karma whenever he acts like a schlep! And so on, for all the other heroes.

*(EDITORIAL INTRUSION: I agree with Allen's point, but his example is absolutely wrong. Peter Parker tries hard **not** to act like a schlep, and he should be rewarded when he manages to avoid doing so. —Winsome Warren.)*

ITEM! Another grave omission in the game is simply unconscionable: though these rules cover Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, most of the Avengers, Dr. Strange, Daredevil, the Inhumans, numerous villains, the Watcher, the Negative Zone, Atlantis, Asgard, and the rest of the Marvel cosmos, *nowhere* is there a single credit line for the chief architect of that cosmos, the creator of *all* the above mythic figures and places, Stan Lee! The corporate mentality that has blighted Marvel for so long which dictates that individual efforts must become anonymous, work-made-for-hire contributions to the faceless communal entity, is unfortunately in full evidence in ***Marvel Super Heroes***.

ITEM! For reviews of the ***MSH*** adventure ***The Breeder Bombs*** and the supplement ***Avengers Assembled***, see page 44.

The year is 2615. Interstellar space travel has been commonplace for centuries. But the human expansion of the galaxy has been confined by four barrier zones of alien design. A recent invention has made it possible to pass through the fourth barrier zone, known as the Quadra Zone. Come explore the unknown regions of space that lie "BEYOND THE QUADRA ZONE."

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One From the H.A.R.T.

A Generic Superhero Adventure

by Gregg Sharp
Developed by Allen Varney
Art by Denis Loubet

Playtesters: David Noel, Norman Banduch, Creede Lambard, Sharleen Lambard, David Ladyman, Denis Loubet.

One From the H.A.R.T. is a three-part adventure scenario for any superhero roleplaying game. It is designed for 2–4 beginning or low-powered characters and can be played easily in one or two sessions. The scenario is written "generically" to be easily adaptable for use with ***Champions, Superworld, Marvel Super Heroes***, or any "super" RPG. Statistics for ***Champions*** are provided in an appendix to the adventure. If you intend to play this adventure, you should STOP READING HERE.

Part One: H.A.R.T. Break

The underworld grapevine has been buzzing for months now with vague rumors of a new source for high-tech weaponry. A major criminal organization (VIPER, Hydra, or whatever international-organization-bent-on-world-conquest you use in your campaign) has apparently secured a number of advanced weapons and — rumor has it — has been testing them in its illegal operations. A recent daring robbery of a South African jeweler's exchange is said to have involved laser rifles; in Singapore a month ago an otherwise ordinary bank heist reputedly included remarkable weapons that fired beams of both heat and intense cold. Elsewhere, there have been several incidents of deserted buildings or patches of open ground collapsing mysteriously, as if under great weights. There are whispers that VIPER (or whichever organization) is "planning something *big*."

The heroes have learned through detective work, a paid informant, some dependent NPC, or even from unofficial sources in government intelligence work that one important shipping center for these advanced weapons is located in their own city. A (supposedly) little-used warehouse of the H.A.R.T. (Highland Alarm and Regulation Timers) Company has gone from stocking travel alarm clocks to illegal weaponry. The company itself is almost certainly unaware of the switch; VIPER's takeover was entirely covert. The heroes must investigate the H.A.R.T. warehouse, confiscate or destroy the weaponry on the premises, and attempt to discover further stations in the distribution chain — as well as where and how this weaponry is being manufactured.

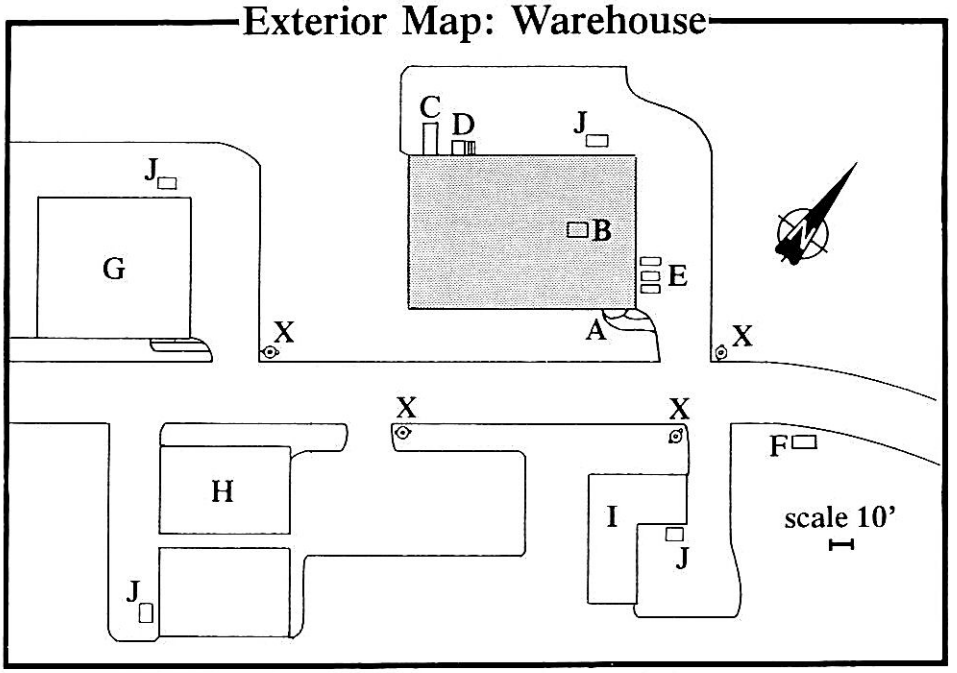
The H.A.R.T. warehouse is located in either a downtown area or, more likely, an airport industrial park. From the outside it appears to be a normal brick warehouse on a perfectly normal street; there are a couple of potted shrubs out front, a loading dock with a diesel trailer (no cab) in back, and in the parking lot are three luxury cars. However, characters with a "danger sense" will get a strong premonition about the building.

The warehouse's exterior and surroundings will be described first, then its personnel and interior will be detailed.

EXTERIOR MAP

A: The main door to the warehouse, through the offices. Heavy wood door with peephole at eye level. The wall for two meters on either side has full-length reflective glass windows which are easily breakable.

Exterior Map: Warehouse



B: Roof hatch of heavy sheet metal which leads down to the warehouse docks. Small metal ladder extends down within. Locked from inside.

C: The trailer sits here; no cab is attached. It blocks the shipping/receiving doors. Heavy steel construction. It is currently half-filled with fifty heavy wood crates (100 kg each) of VIPER laser rifles. The crates are labelled "E404 H.A.R.T. Kitchen Timers"; their addresses are in code. The partially-loaded trailer weighs five tons, in case someone wants to lift it out of the way.

D: Fire door; heavy sheet metal. If the forklift is not in use it will be parked behind this door, which opens outward. It has no outside handle.

E: Three luxury cars, black Eldorados. These belong to three of the thugs who staff the warehouse; the others catch the bus.

F: A police call box, weight 500 kg.

G: NuovoTex, a textile company. Three small cars.

H: McCullough Chainsaw Company. This branch closed about a month ago.

I: Aspirin factory. This too closed a month ago, due to VIPER's subversive activities.

X: Fire hydrants located at each corner.

J: Dumpsters.

IN THE WAREHOUSE

Exterior walls of the warehouse are ordinary brick. Interior walls are plasterboard. Characters can enter by several methods. The front door is heavy wood; the roof access door is heavy sheet metal; the back warehouse door is the same sheet metal. Punching through any of these is fairly straightforward, if not necessarily well-advised.

If a character with tunneling powers tries breaking through the flooring inside the warehouse, it is steel-reinforced concrete, six inches thick. Anyone with electrical powers can short out the electric lines leading to the warehouse, but automatic generators will cut in within one to six seconds.

X-ray vision will show the interior clearly. Infrared vision will reveal that all the doorways except the roof hatch have infrared light alarms; breaking the beam of light will trigger an alarm in seven seconds unless a concealed switch by each doorway is pressed to deactivate it. (Perception rolls to find the switches should be at a substantial minus, because they are well hidden.)

Any character who simply walks up to the door and knocks will be greeted by one of the thugs listed below. No one is allowed in the building, and nothing is sold at this location. The character will be referred to the nearest H.A.R.T. Company office that *can* sell him travel alarm clocks. The same goes for any telephone calls. A hero who barges past the thug at the door will be shot repeatedly by at least three other thugs, who will be braced and ready to fire right behind him.

Six thugs (VIPER agents) staff the warehouse. Three of them, in shipping/receiving, are standard normals armed with revolvers. They are Moe Svenson, Larry Haines, and Charlie "Curly" Adamson. Slightly faster and more formidable than these three are Lenny Jamieson, the forklift operator, and David Hasselmeyer, shipping/receiving. They are both armed with semi-automatic heavy pistols. The sixth thug is Harry McCannis, overseer and agent of the VIPER laboratory that produces the weapons. Treat him as a "talented normal," moderately strong and fast and with some martial arts ability. He has a laser rifle slung over one shoulder and is a good shot with it.

(*Gamemaster note:* This adventure is designed for low-powered characters and emphasizes stealthy detective work. If your characters seem too powerful for the thugs given or want to storm right in and start fighting, consider including a moderately low-powered super-villain in the opposition.)

During normal business hours Harry will be in the main office working on the computer; Lenny will be running the forklift; the others will be loading the trailer. Should the alarm sound, at least one thug will guard each entrance, and one will train his weapon on the roof hatch. Harry will ready a hand-held remote-control switch that will cause the computer to erase all information in its files, as well as all shipping labels not already used. Harry holds this remote unit at all times, and all the employees know about it. If the break-in is definite and it looks like the heroes are winning, the same remote unit can activate another process that only Harry knows about: a 20-second countdown ending in the destruction of the entire warehouse. Only Harry can cancel the countdown once started; the process is cancelled by typing a code into the computer terminal in the main office. If Harry has already wiped the computer's memory, the code will not work and the countdown cannot be stopped.

If the heroes decide to wait until everyone at the warehouse has left before attempting to enter, the last car will pull away about 5:00 p.m. Harry will remain on the site around the clock until it's discarded (in another month or so). After business hours he will be in his room (see interior map).

Should the heroes undertake long-term surveillaince of the warehouse instead of barging in directly, a truck arrives each Tuesday afternoon to pick up the filled trailer and replace it with an empty one. (There will be no deliveries of new weapons to the warehouse until after VIPER's "big project" is completed; see part three). The truck, which bears H.A.R.T. Company markings, is solidly built and reinforced with stress-steel. A turreted machine-gun (automatic fire only) can pop out of the top of the cab, giving the driver a 210-degree field of fire.

The truck is driven by Zeke Zeppelin, a talented career VIPER agent. Arrogant and not a little bloodthirsty, Zeke will be tough to intimidate and very unlikely to betray VIPER under any circumstances. A radio link between the truck cab and Epsilon Station (the nearest VIPER headquarters or "nest") is kept open at all times; should Zeke report an attack on the truck, or should Epsilon Station overhear suspicious sounds or interrogation, it can trigger a self-destruct device in the truck cab which will totally destroy the cab and trailer. As you might expect, Zeke doesn't know this.

If the characters follow the truck without attempting to attack it, Zeke will lead them to Epsilon Station and the next part of the adventure.

If the heroes break into the warehouse and Harry triggers the memory-wipe switch, the truck won't show up. Instead, about an hour after the switch is activated, a small private plane (a Cessna 152) will fly overhead and a single package will be released from the wheelmount catch. This is a bomb, powerful enough to destroy the warehouse, targeted at its exact center. It will explode eight seconds after ejection. (Note: VIPER could not destroy the warehouse by remote control because the computer's memory was wiped.) The plane is piloted by Janet Penderton (see next section of the scenario); if characters trail the plane, it will lead them to Epsilon Station.

INTERIOR MAP

A: Main office. Three large desks against the far wall. On one is a computer terminal and keyboard. If a hero turns it on, it requires computer programming skill to find the passwords to break into the system. Successfully "cracking" the system will tell the players the location of Epsilon Station, as well as that of the laboratory (in the third part of the adventure). If Harry has set off the memory-wipe switch, the computer will tell the players nothing.

On another desk is an outgoing mail basket. Characters who make a successful Spot Hidden, perception, or similar roll will note a letter to be mailed to an address in the countryside outside town; the name above the address is "Lily Garrot." Inside is an expense voucher from Harry, requesting reimbursement for "office supplies and ammunition." The letter is going, of course, to Epsilon Station.

B: Bathroom.

C: Closet, containing office supplies and ammunition.

D: Harry's room. Protected by two active-sonar alarms: Anything solid that moves within the room will trigger the alarm in seven seconds. The room contains a king-size waterbed with a transistor radio built into the headboard. A concealed foot-switch near the headboard controls the alarm. There is also a cupboard, a portable dresser (containing a freshly-pressed VIPER uniform), and a large mainframe computer with a tape loaded and running through the system during working hours.

E: Ladder leading up to roof hatch.

F: Main hall. Coat racks line the wall near Harry's room. Should these be checked, the third from the left conceals yet another remote-control switch — this one deactivates the alarms in Harry's room. In a pocket of the fourth coat is a slip of paper with a phone number; this is to the White Hart Tavern (see the third part of this adventure).

G: These are metal warehouse shelves with the "merchandise" (weapons) stored on pallets. The shelves are actually two metal beams horizontally placed so that pallets may be rested upon them.

H: Forklift. Plate metal construction, weight 600 kg. When not in use it will be parked against the fire door.

I: A table with printing labels, address slips, UPS codes, weight scales, etc. During business hours one parcel wrapped in brown paper lies on this table; its address, not encoded, is to Zeke Zeppelin at a countryside address (Epsilon Station's). Inside the package is a kit for building a Japanese model robot. An attached note reads, "Zeke — Hope you enjoy it! Moe."

The west wall of the warehouse has all the "merchandise" currently in stock. It is electronic in nature, so flames or intense heat will not cause explosions. All pallets or crates will be marked with a stock number and "H.A.R.T. Alarm Clocks."

Important: None of the weapons below are currently functional! They will be "powered up" when delivered to their destinations (the power units have already been shipped separately). However, each of the thugs carries a concealed charger-unit that will allow these weapons to work for *him*. A thug can open a crate and get a weapon from it in ten seconds.

G1: Six crates marked "E101-A H.A.R.T. Travel Alarm." Each contains twelve separately-packed single-shot magnesium flare rifles. These produce an intense flash at the target; each has thirty shots. If your game system doesn't have rules for flash effects, consider that each flash will blind an unprotected viewer for one minute.

G2: Ten pallets of twelve boxes each, labelled "E101-B H.A.R.T. Pocket Alarms." Inside each box are a dozen flash grenades. Effects are identical to those of flare rifles.

G3: Twelve crates marked "J301 H.A.R.T. Desk Alarm." Inside each are a dozen auto-blaster rifles. (If these are fired, treat them as advanced laser rifles, selective fire, 30 charges.)

G4: Ten crates marked "R7201 Wall Clock H.A.R.T." Each contains twelve thermex double-switch blast rifles. Each rifle has a switch that puts it from an ice ray of intense cold to a powerful heat ray. The device can fire a total of 15 shots of both kinds. If your game system doesn't provide for different effects from heat and cold, treat these as "ordinary" laser rifles.

G5: Twelve large crates marked "X252 Car Alarm H.A.R.T." Each crate includes six ultra-rifles and a power source for each (worn slung on the back). Each ultra-rifle can fire an X-ray laser beam, cold ray, or powerful explosive charge (15 charges). These can be treated as "super lasers" if the GM wishes.

G6: About 50 small cartons, each marked "B255 LED Car Alarm H.A.R.T." Each contains a single device: a black cube with one white button. This is a special type of hand grenade. The cube will explode six seconds after the white button is pushed. Its blast radius is about 20 feet. The blast does severe damage within that radius, virtually nothing beyond it. If any of the other black cubes are within the blast radius, they too will explode from sympathetic vibrations. If the entire cache explodes, the blast will level the entire warehouse.

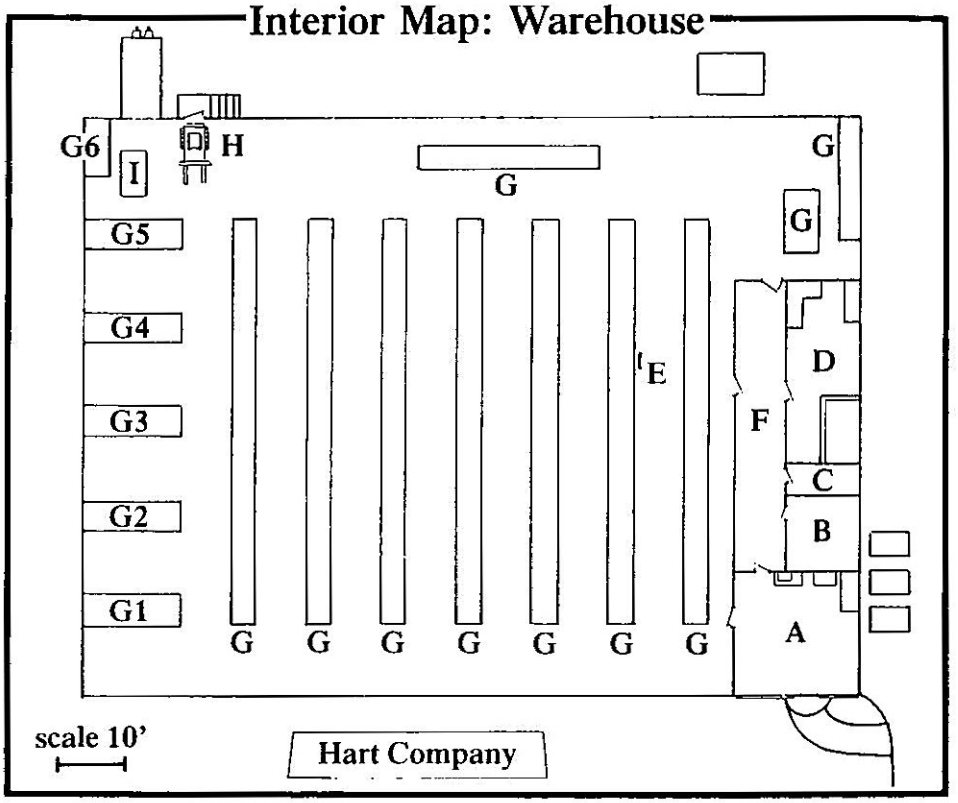
Heroes who examine these weapons will see that they are obviously far beyond any existing human technology. Each weapon is inscribed on its hilt or side with a tiny line of characters in some unknown alphabet of curved lines and dots. The evidence points to one obvious, and true, implication: these weapons were made for — but not *by* — human beings.

Part Two: Station Break

By some means the heroes should have discovered the location of Epsilon Station during the first part of the adventure. The addresses on the letter and the package point the way, as do the trails of the truck and the plane. A telepathic superhero could read the minds of the driver, the pilot, or Harry to learn the address. If all else fails, the same informant who told the heroes about the warehouse can show up again with the station address.

Epsilon Station is a small private airstrip and hangar located about ten miles outside the city where your campaign is set. At this station the weaponry shipments are broken down and delivered by plane to certain subversive organizations around the country. No such deliveries will be made while the heroes are here; shipments have been postponed while VIPER undertakes its "big project" (see part three).

Trees and hills conceal Epsilon Station from view from the nearest highway; the only indication of its existence is an unlabelled



mailbox at the head of an inconspicuous dirt road. The road shows signs of recent use.

EXTERIOR MAP

The road winds back through the trees until it reaches the area shown on the exterior map below. This shows a small airplane hangar within a fenced enclosure, and the airstrip beyond it. At A is another mailbox, seemingly identical to the one by the highway except that it rests on a pole six feet high, for the truck driver's access. Inside the "mailbox" is a small electronic keyboard; typing the proper code sequence will open the gate and deactivate the alarms. Zeke Zeppelin and all the personnel within the Station know the code, but it's not exactly uppermost in their minds — so a mind-reading hero will have to penetrate pretty deeply into a given memory to retrieve it. An improper code sequence triggers an alarm and visual scan within the Station.

Heroes with mental powers, however, will find it extremely difficult to penetrate the station by mind alone. A recently-developed VIPER force field, controlled from the control room inside, protects the Station's occupants from mind-scanning and telepathy. (In ***Champions***, the building has 15 points of Ego Defense, bought using the "Hideouts and Headquarters" rules in ***Champions II***.)

At B is an ordinary-looking rock thrusting out of the road. A vehicle has a 90% chance of hitting this rock unless specifically avoiding it; a pedestrian has a 30% chance. The rock conceals a switch that will trigger an alarm within the base unless it was deactivated by the mailbox keyboard.

The Station's response to either of these alarms will depend to a large extent on how suspicious the investigating heroes appear. If there are only two or three of them and they're dressed in ordinary street clothes, "Ace" Muller will investigate. With his balding pate and potbelly, he doesn't resemble anyone's idea of a master spy . . . which is what makes him so effective. He will inform the intruders that this is private property and will bring attention to his shotgun. He will not leave the fenced area. (Treat "Ace" as a talented ordinary person in your system, with a variety of espionage-type skills. ***Champions*** stats for "Ace" are given in the appendix.)

If the heroes have triggered one of the alarms and they are in full costume, or displaying their powers, or — perhaps worst of all — completely camouflaged and undetectable, Epsilon Station will go to full alert: the supervillain Black Scout will investigate the alarm, backed up by VIPER agent "Machine Gun" Kelly, and the giant alien monster called the "bertlahr" will be let loose in the fenced area. (For statistics and descriptions of these characters, see the appendix.)

The fence surrounding the hangar area is electrified at 50,000 volts, and will do substantial damage to anyone who touches it. Red DANGER signs are posted on each side of the fence. Controls for the fence are in the control room of the hangar (see interior map). Deactivating the alarm at the mailbox keyboard will open the fence gate and turn off the current for the gate only. Any break in the fence triggers an alarm and full alert. Outside the fence the grass is unmowed, full of weeds, and about 2½ feet high; inside the fence the ground is covered with artificial turf.

The last perimeter alarm is a network of criss-crossing ultraviolet beams that covers the yard within the fence at a height of two feet above the ground. Characters invisible in ultra-violet light won't trip the beam. Any other invisible character *will*. Heroes with shrinking powers can walk under the beams, and characters who can see ultraviolet light can step carefully among them; anyone else who is walking upright will interfere with the path of the beams and set off an alarm in the Station, triggering a full alert. The electric-eye sources for the beams are located around the perimeter of the yard, inside the electric fence — just out of arm's reach. This is just as well, because destroying an electric eye will cut off its beam, and the receiving sensors located around the hangar will therefore set off the alarm. Characters can crawl under the beams . . . but they'll move slowly, and risk detection while they're exposed.

There are five VIPER agents on duty at the hangar. Zeke Zeppelin is the driver and artillery expert. He will back up "Ace" Muller if necessary. "Machine Gun" Kelly is a homicidal maniac; he will back up Black Scout if the perimeter alarm goes off. Lily Garrot is the team leader; if the Station goes to full alert, she will be in the control room ready to wipe the computer memory with a large electromagnet. Janet Penderton is the Cessna pilot.

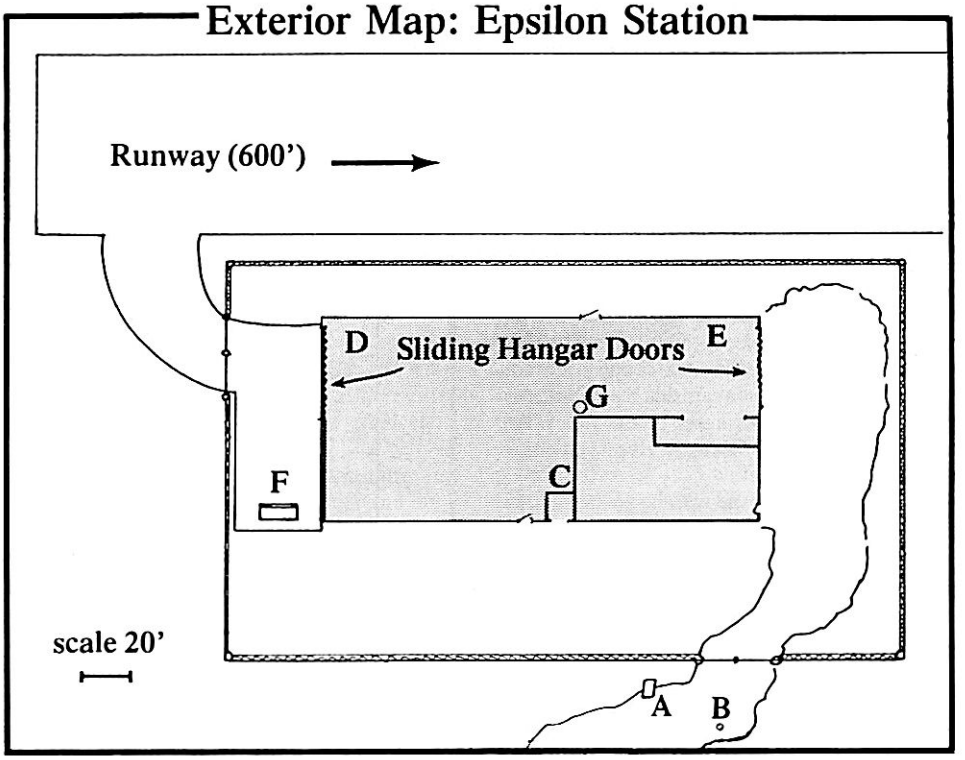
Janet Penderton is a potential ally for the heroes. Recently she has become alienated by VIPER's bloodthirsty methods and is planning to desert. During the characters' invasion, she'll simply escape in the plane or truck (or on foot) if given half a chance, leaving the others to face the heroes; if she escapes, that will be the last VIPER ever hears about her and they will presume that she was killed. She will open a detective agency under another name in three months. But if the heroes catch her, she may opt to switch sides and aid them, at the gamemaster's discretion. Another GM option is to have a budding romance between Penderton and "Ace" Muller; she might persuade him to fight for the good guys as well.

If the heroes reach the Station without triggering any of the alarms, Lily Garrot will be in the control room and Janet Penderton will be in her bedroom; the others will be in the lounge watching TV. All will have weapons within easy reach.

The hangar itself is 50' wide, 90' long, and 15' high, and is made of heavy wood. The huge west door is made of light sheet metal; it's 40' wide, dividing at the center and sliding back into the walls. If the heroes followed the plane to get here, the doors are wide open; otherwise they're closed and locked. The east hangar door is similar sheet metal, 20' wide, and slides into the north wall when opened. The doors to the north and south are ordinary person-size, made of plate metal, and locked.

At C on the map is a large cage made of thick oak planking. The alien bertlahr is kept here in the daytime. Black Scout, the only agent brave enough to deal with the monster, lets it out of its cage at night to roam around the empty hangar, then puts it back in in the morning; during an alert the bertlahr is let directly into the yard through a remote-controlled hatch in the hangar wall.

The Cessna aircraft sits at D on the map unless it has just scored a bombing run on the H.A.R.T. warehouse in section one. The truck is normally parked at E. F is an aviation-fuel pump tapping underground fuel tanks. It is constructed of sturdy metal and should be pretty tough to destroy. When it takes damage, there is a base 40% chance — modified ac-



cording to the type and severity of the damage it takes — that it will explode; if it doesn't explode, highly flammable fuel will pour out in a large puddle on the concrete canopy, where it will ignite at the least provocation.

The canopy, like the airstrip, is made of specially-reinforced concrete. On a warm day it can get quite hot, giving off waves of heat that will interfere with a hero's infrared vision. The airstrip is 30' wide, 600' long, and is surrounded by open scrub for its entire length. (Drivers who see it from the highway usually assume it's an old, closed road.)

At G on the map is a large metal cylinder sticking up from the concrete floor of the hangar. It's about two meters high and one meter in circumference; it extends another four meters underground. Treat its walls as light armor. The cylinder is the Station's self-destruct mechanism. The interior is filled with gelignite, a powerful explosive; should this be set off, whether by a remote-control command from the control room or accidentally (by any breach in its armor), the explosion will destroy the entire hangar. For approximately five minutes after the explosion, the hangar will burn uncontrollably. Only Lily Garrot and "Machine Gun" Kelly know how to set the self-destruct mechanism, and both will do it if they have no other chance to fight off the heroes.

INTERIOR MAP

Most of the hangar is empty space; Epsilon Station proper is the 25' x 40' domicile within its walls. Station walls are light sheet metal, ten feet high; there is a five-foot gap between the Station roof and the hangar ceiling. The Station roof is of the same sheet metal.

All interior doors are locked with thumbprint scan devices. All except the control room doors are standard wood doors; the control room door is lightly armored.

Interior alarms consist of computer-controlled TV scanners that survey all rooms and hallways except the bathrooms, the thumbprint scanners (which will beep loudly at an unauthorized print, alerting the VIPER agents) and blaster detectors hidden in the walls. If a detector notes any kind of energy blast or sudden change in temperature, it will activate the alarm.

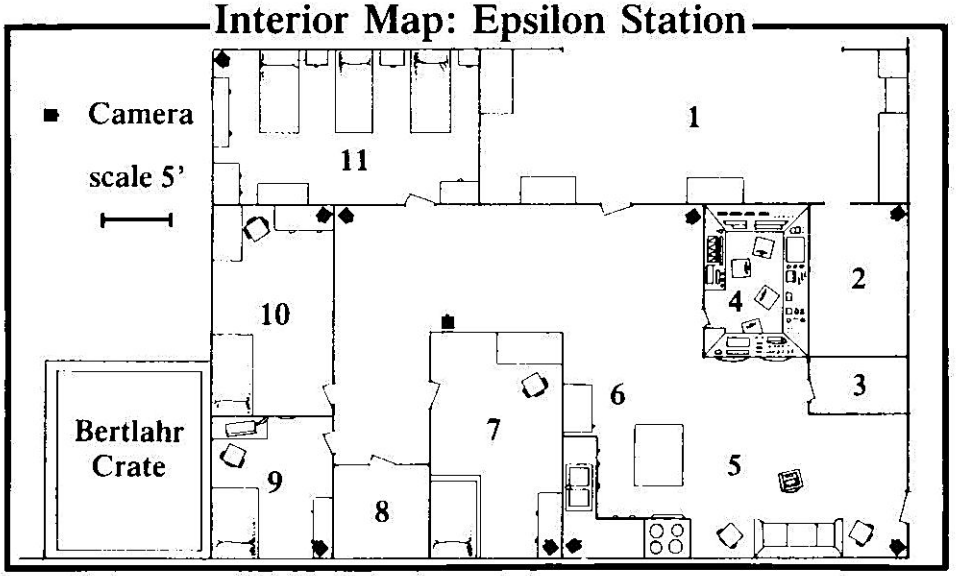
Room 1: Primary dock for the truck and other VIPER vehicles that occasionally show up. Not a "room" as such, this area opens directly on the hangar. Here the truck is prepared for the regular Tuesday afternoon shipment. Tool chests along the walls contain maintenance equipment and ammunition.

Room 2: Storeroom with truck parts. There is a continuous stun field in this room unless one of the agents has punched in the proper clearance code on a numeric panel by the thumbprint lock. The stun field is sonic, and will easily knock a normal person unconscious in two seconds.

Room 3: Bathroom. One of the few places not rigged for alarms or under surveillance.

Room 4: Control room. Video screens show the road outside, random hallway shots, the runway, and the bedrooms. A shortwave

Interior Map: Epsilon Station



radio unit inset into a console is tuned to a special prearranged frequency that will connect the user with "the lab" (scene of the third part of the adventure). No one but Garrot and "Machine Gun" Kelly is authorized to use the radio; the listeners on the other end know their voices and will immediately suspect a strange one. They can remotely detonate the self-destruct mechanism from the lab; this will take ten seconds.

There is a large computer console in the control room. A character with computer programming skill will find it a fairly easy task to determine the address of the receiving end of the datalink — i.e., the lab — so long as Garrot has not wiped the computer memory.

Room 5: Lounge. Couch, table, chairs, TV set. On top of the TV is a videotape recorder and several illegal (and indiscreet) videocassettes. The walls of the lounge have video screens identical to those in the control room, showing the road outside, hallways, and the runway, but not the bedrooms. The GM should give any VIPER agents in the lounge perception or Spot Hidden rolls to detect a hero's stealthy approach.

Room 6: Kitchen area, well-stocked. Refrigerator, cabinets, a counter with several hotplates.

Room 7: Lily Garrot's bedroom. Concealed behind the bedboard of the waterbed is a LAW (Light Anti-tank Weapon; essentially a one-shot bazooka). Hidden under the pillow is a knife. In a large wooden wardrobe is a single-shot rifle with a clip of 30 shots and a cleaning kit. On a shelf is a ham radio with an emergency distress switch set to a VIPER frequency.

Room 8: Main bathroom. Includes a shower stall.

Room 9: Black Scout's bedroom. Closet, wallscreen TV, desk with personal computer. Waterbed covered by black silk cover; hidden under it is a single concussion grenade. In a torn envelope on a dresser is a cashier's check drawn on a local bank for $75,000, along with a note saying "Dallas is on for (*insert next day's date*). Don't get closer than 70 miles." Beside the envelope is a matchbook from the White Hart bar (scene of part three).

Room 10: Janet Penderton's bedroom. Closet, waterbed, bookcases filled with aviation manuals and murder mysteries. Under the bed is a backpack with survival rations, a bedroll, and two sets of clothes. Janet is just waiting for a chance to leave. A freshly-pressed VIPER uniform is draped over the camera lens in the ceiling corner.

Room 11: Bedroom shared by Zeke Zeppelin, "Machine Gun" Kelly, and "Ace" Muller. Three small waterbeds, a closet, shelves with some model airplanes and Japanese robot models. No books. The middle bed, "Machine Gun's," conceals three heavy pistols and a matchbook from the White Hart bar.

★ ★ ★

What should the GM do if the heroes miss *all* the clues to the lab's location, punch out the agents instead of interrogating them, destroy the Station, and can't read anyone's mind? How do you get them into the third part of the adventure? A desperate GM might consider the following stratagem:

As the heroes stand among the burning wreckage of Epsilon Station, they hear a car approach. This is a small imported model driven by George "Speed" Lambard, a small-time VIPER agent who works at the lab in the White Hart bar. Speed has come to take Lily Garrot out to dinner (or lunch as the case may be); as soon as he sees something is wrong, he will frantically back out and tear away from Epsilon Station at high velocity. However, characters should have no trouble catching him before he escapes; he won't put up a fight.

Speed is a craven coward, and he'll tell the heroes his name, rank, serial number, the location of the lab, everything he knows about the personnel there (not much) and the alien weaponry (nothing), the "big plot" VIPER has to ransom the entire city of Dallas, Texas (he knows no other details), his mother's maiden name, and anything else he thinks will keep the heroes from hitting him. Treat Speed as an untalented jerk, a real mouth-breather.

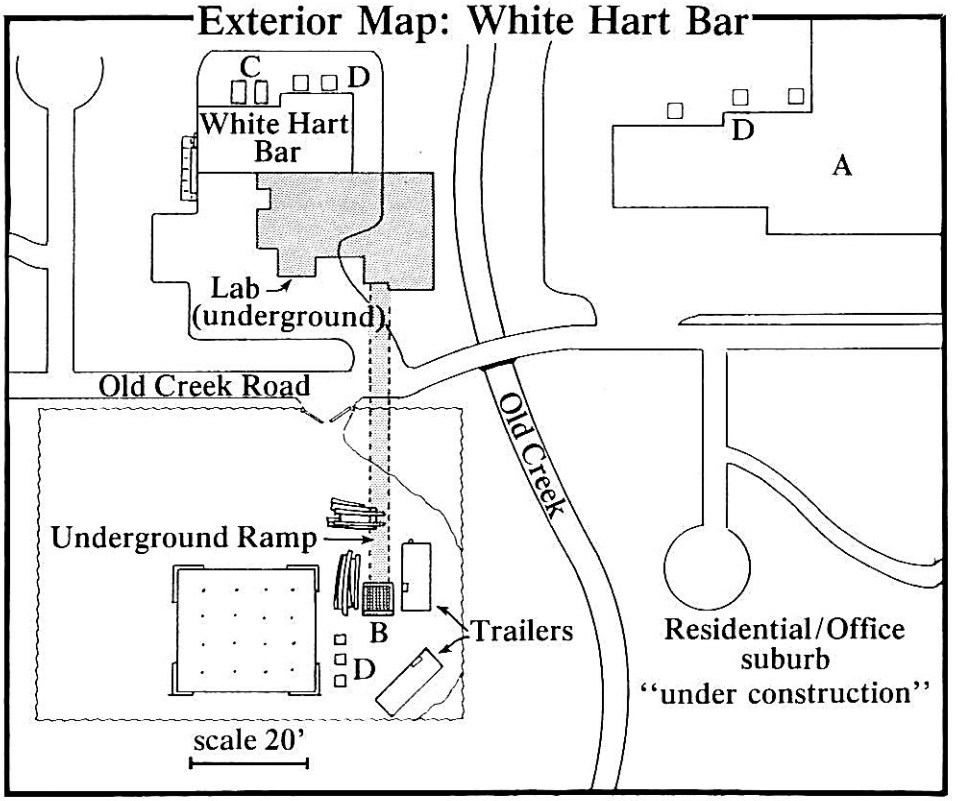
If the heroes attempt to take Speed along in part three of the scenario to provide clues to the lab's layout, the GM should make him highly susceptible to fainting spells at strategic moments.

Part Three: A Fistful of Dallas (or, The Good, The Bad, and the Alien)

In this section the heroes will finally encounter the alien scientist who designs the advanced weaponry, and learn of VIPER's nefarious "big project." Both are located in an underground laboratory, concealed beneath an innocent-looking bar called the White Hart, found on an innocent-looking street named Old Creek Road.

EXTERIOR MAP

The street is called Old Creek Road, but "Old Creek" is really just one of those fetid concrete-lined drainage ditches that runs through this would-be housing development. Old Creek Road is the main street of a new suburban office-and-residential subdivision, now being constructed on the eastern edge of your campaign city. As the exterior map shows, the only completed structure on the street is the White Hart Tavern and restaurant; the other buildings nearby are still under construction (and will remain permanently "under construction" until VIPER decides to abandon this base). Site A will be a mini-mall "strip" shopping center, while B is the recently-poured foundation of a small office complex. A chain-link fence surrounds the lot, but the gate is wide open. Concealed at B, among the construction trailers and piles of girders, is a large hatch in the cement. The hatch slides back when opened, revealing a gently-sloping concrete ramp that leads to the underground laboratory (described further on). This ramp is used for deliveries and pickups at the lab, and at the moment for one very *special* pickup — but despite this tempting mode of entry, players will definitely *not* be able to make it to the lab this way. The ramp, about 150 feet long, is so heavily defended that the characters should not be able to get too far along before dying or falling unconscious; there are lasers, sonics, nerve gas, etc. These are automatic defenses, computer-controlled, and will not be as severe in effect if the heroes are retreating *out* of the tunnel. The weapons can be deactivated from the control console in Lyla Raptor's office (see below). The hatch is made of armor-plate steel, and locked.



At C on the map are two cars parked behind the bar: an empty pickup truck and a Porsche. The Ds are dumpsters.

Outwardly, the White Hart tavern looks like a homey little wooden building with lots of windows in the restaurant area, shrubbery outside, and a mural of a white deer painted on the side of the building facing the road. Actually, the windows are bulletproof, the wooden siding conceals armor-plate steel, and there are concealed gunports and viewing slits at every corner of the building. The front door (bulletproof plate glass) is locked except during business hours, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m.; the back door (plate steel) is always locked. Both have burglar alarms, as do the windows.

Both the bar and the laboratory beneath it are protected by the same force field against mental energy that protected Epsilon Station (see previous section). Mind scans and telepathy by outside heroes against those inside will be very difficult. (In ***Champions***, the building has 15 points Ego Defense.)

INTERIOR MAP

Room 1: The barroom. From about 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. the room will be crowded with 15-20 customers who know nothing about VIPER or the secret laboratory. There are six booths, four tables with four chairs each, and the bar itself with twelve barstools. The bar and the chairs are hardwood. The tables and barstools have metal bases and are bolted to the floor. A ceiling-high hardwood partition creates a short hallway to the restrooms. At A on the east wall is a pinball machine weighing 200 kg; high score so far is 100,012. At B is a phone booth. Behind the bar are a lot of bottles and a long mirror. The bar is very clean and stylishly decorated.

The bartender at the White Hart is a big burly guy named Cliff Noel, a low-rank VIPER agent who knows about the secret lab and can probably be "persuaded" to tell about it without much trouble. During business hours two waitresses named Kim and Mara also staff the bar; they are ordinary people who know nothing about VIPER or the lab. Cliff keeps a heavy pistol among the brandy bottles under the bar counter.

Room 2: Sign on the door says "Broom Closet." That's what it is. Brooms, buckets, mops, cleaning utensils.

Room 3: Men's restroom.

Room 4: Women's restroom.

Room 5: Kitchen. The door to the bar is a swinging double door with no lock. A couple of ovens, a large stove, a grille, refrigerator-freezer, lots of pots and pans on the walls and shelves. Wooden butcher blocks in the center of the room, not attached to the floor but *very* heavy for their size (300 kg). VIPER agent Leonard Moniy works back here during business hours as short order cook (and not a very

good one). Leonard has a knife concealed in one boot and a shotgun concealed behind the refrigerator. He also has a remote-control push-button unit in his pocket that will alert everyone in the office and the lab if he hears a disturbance in the barroom.

Two normals named Warren and Chris work here during the busy part of the evening (9 p.m. to midnight) as dishwashers and scullery help.

Room 6: Office of the comptroller of this base, Lyla Raptor. The room is luxuriously appointed, with track lighting, thick carpeting, and Impressionist paintings on the walls. File cabinets line the west wall; they contain nothing but legitimate business files detailing the White Hart's operations, giving no indication of its criminal functions. Inspection of the files reveals a thriving business and the W-2 forms and tax records of those involved. The only really suspicious fact the files reveal is the exceptionally high staff salaries. That the bartender makes $12.50 an hour may give the heroes an idea of what's going on!

The room is dominated by a large mahogany desk with a reflective glass top. A button under the edge of the desk causes a section of the top to slide back, revealing a bewildering array of pushbuttons. There are dozens of them, none labelled. Lyla uses this console to control the building's defenses, the lighting in the rooms, air conditioning, etc.; several buttons send prerecorded messages out on prearranged VIPER frequencies; and many buttons do nothing at all. One particular button is colored bright red and protected by a spring-loaded safety catch. This button will trigger a ten-second self-destruct sequence that will destroy the bar and the lab beneath. The catch is locked and only Lyla and the two lab guards (see below) have keys.

The east half of the south wall has a tall oak cabinet set into it, which is locked. The cabinet contains five thermex double-switch blast rifles (from part one of this adventure). Lyla, the guards, and the bartender all have keys to the cabinet. A hidden switch inside the cabinet causes the entire cabinet to slide into the wall, revealing the staircase leading down to the lab below.

During business hours, and for an hour before and after closing, Lyla will be sitting at the desk. She is a calculating and ambitious VIPER agent who pursued a successful criminal career in Greece before immigrating to America. She will make every effort to defend the base from the heroes until and unless the situation looks hopeless; then she will attempt to escape, either in her Porsche or by flying away with the rocket belt she wears beneath her pantsuit jacket. Lyla carries a heavy pistol and is a very good shot with it.

Room 7: Stairway to the lab. If an alarm is activated, a special barrier will fall into place at the top of the staircase, blocking it completely. The barrier is very tough armor plate. Should it be breached, a *really* special barrier will immediately fall into place at the bottom of the same staircase, just in front of the entryway to the lab. This barrier is practically impenetrable, being made of Questonite, adamantium steel, or whatever unreasonably strong material your game uses. Note, however, that the walls of the stairway are very ordinary wood or brick construction, and heroes can penetrate them quite easily — but don't tell the players that, let them figure it out! If they *do* figure the way around the barrier, they'll have to dig through about five feet of dirt and break through another wall to enter the laboratory (which may prove difficult, since the walls are thick metal).

At the bottom of the staircase is a steel door, edged with rubber to form an airtight seal in the jamb. The door has no knob, is unlocked, and will swing open at a touch. By the door, on the wall of the stairwell, is a rack of pegs with gas masks hanging from them. These masks will allow characters to function normally in the highly oxygenated atmosphere of the alien's laboratory.

THE LABORATORY

The entire laboratory is gleaming white, sterile-looking, and brightly lighted even though no light source is evident. Most walls of each room are lined with shelves containing unidentifiable futuristic-looking equipment. None of this equipment is usable by the characters. The walls of the laboratory are thick, dense metal (hard to tunnel through), which serves as radiation shielding in emergencies. All doors between rooms have the rubber-sealed airtight doorjambs.

The lab is five meters underground. A special lead shield surrounds all parts of the lab except the staircase and the ramp, preventing surveillance by X-ray vision.

The air of the lab is warm, moist, almost steamy. The oxygen content is very high: nearly 80%, with the balance being noble gases and some carbon dioxide. There is no nitrogen, which is poisonous to the resident alien in large quantities. Ordinary people without gas masks, and heroes without applicable life-support powers, will begin to be affected by the high oxygen within seven to ten seconds of the time they enter the lab. Without realizing it, characters will begin to feel giddy, slur their speech, lose coordination and alertness, and in general behave as if intoxicated. If characters put on masks or return outside the lab, they will regain their impaired abilities within ten seconds or so — less for heroes with lots of stamina.

Characters with electrical or flame powers may have trouble controlling their powers in this high-oxygen atmosphere. Electrical discharges will create poisonous ozone — and bolts of flame will be more powerful than usual, but may scatter uncontrollably!

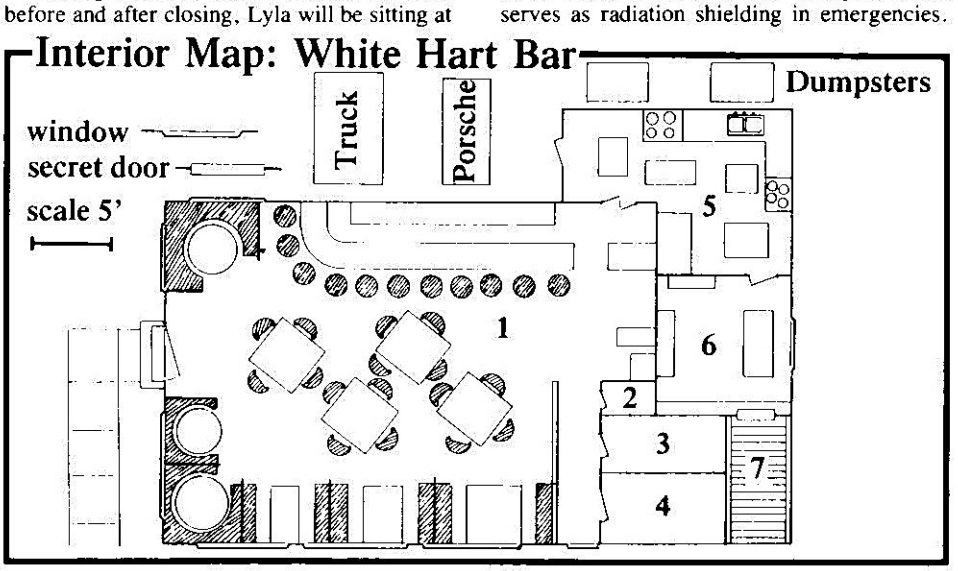
Characters should make intelligence or skill rolls every 10-15 seconds (game time) to retain control of electrical or flame powers. If a hero has general skill levels with these powers, the levels are applied as modifiers to these control rolls — effectively "stripping" them from the character's offense. (That is, all that skill goes to keeping the power under control.) Uncontrolled powers will act as an involuntary area-effect attack on anything and everything in the hero's immediate vicinity (in ***Champions***, a range of one hex), lasting until the hero makes a successful control roll, or runs out of endurance.

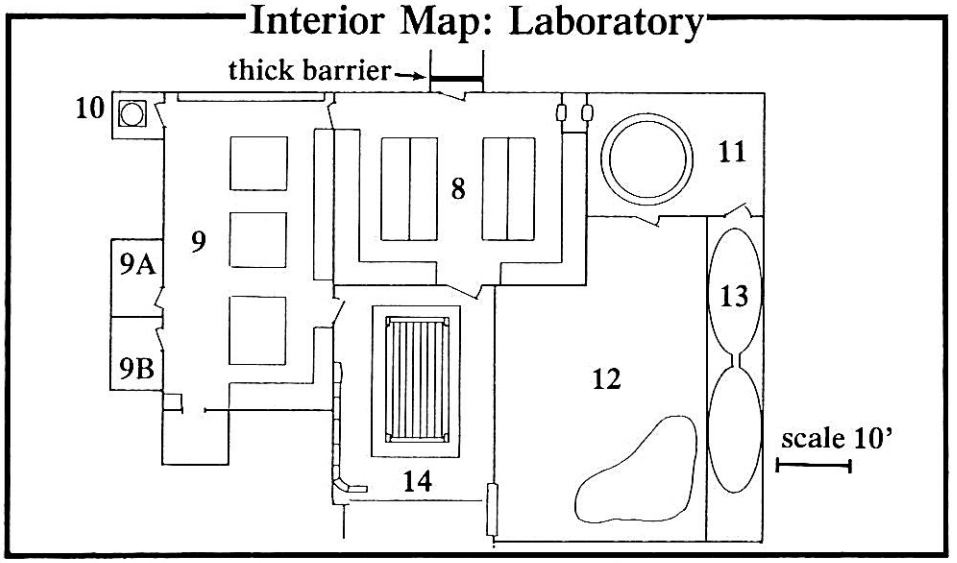
The uncontrolled power can be also be used in a regular attack (simultaneous with the involuntary area attack), but at a substantial minus to the usual attack roll (−3 in ***Champions***). A failed attack "scatters" in a random direction. Flame attacks will do extra damage in the lab's oxygenated atmosphere.

Room 8: Design lab, where the advanced weapons are designed and constructed. Banks of computers line the walls. One large table in the center of the room is covered with blueprints, drafting boards and instruments, and similar design implements; the blueprints are lettered in English and also in the flowing alien script imprinted on the weapons found in part one of the adventure. The other table is covered with weapons in various stages of completion, none currently workable.

None of the technicians normally working in this room are present, because (along with the entire staff of the lab, including the alien) they are busy loading a very important item onto a truck in Room 14. See below.

Room 9: High Energy Lab and Test Range. Around the walls here are lab benches and shelves loaded with incomprehensible gizmos. Three large tables in the center of the room hold completed weapons, all elaborately mounted in delicate metal frameworks and all





trailing a host of cables leading to measuring devices. Power cables litter the floor, and a persistent humming fills the room (which is soundproof). The west side of the room is open and free of obstacles; here weapons are tested by firing them into a special suppressor chamber in the southwest corner of the room (see map). In this way the technicians can measure a weapon's effects without blowing the whole lab to smithereens. The suppressor chamber has a unique force field that controls high-power explosions or energy bursts, keeping them within a manageable sphere. Dials, gauges, and all sorts of diagnostic instruments line the wall around the chamber's opening, which is about a foot square.

The technicians ordinarily here are absent, having adjourned to the adjacent room (Room 14; see below).

Rooms 9A, 9B: Bathrooms.

Room 10: Power supply for the lab and bar. A fragile-looking glass sphere with an incandescent glow in the center, too bright to look at for long. The sphere is in fact almost indestructible. It rests on a featureless metal box. The technology is about five centuries ahead of our own.

There are no wires or connections between the sphere and its base. If the sphere is lifted off the base, the glow fades away. The sphere is cool to the touch.

Room 11: The door from the design lab to this room is an airlock, much like those on submarines or spacecraft. The inner door will not open unless the outer door is closed, and vice versa. Both doors are otherwise "unlocked." These doors are exceptionally strong and durable.

The room is the alien's headquarters; though not here right now, he dwells here while collecting research on criminal elements on Earth. He is working for VIPER under orders from his government, which would like to see a criminal regime conquer this backwater planet and eliminate any opposition — so it could invade, get rid of VIPER, and pick up the pieces that much more easily. The alien is a fat little purple four-armed weaselly creep who sleeps in a hot tub. The tub is scaldingly hot; its water is brackish; the room is as sultry as a sauna; the east half of the room is filled with bizarre alien vegetation colored various nauseous shades of turquoise. Inset in a wall is a powerful communications device the alien uses to communicate with its superiors.

Room 12: Lair of another bertlahr, much like the one players may have encountered in part two. (If the heroes took that one out without much trouble, a creatively evil GM should consider "spicing up" this one with a surprise power or two — regeneration, ejectable "quills," or *something* unexpected.)

The alien scientist keeps the bertlahr as a food animal. He considers the wart-like, suppurating protrusions on the creature's abdomen to be a great delicacy, and scoops out hunks of this fleshy stuff from the animal's torso twice daily.

The lair is filled with alien vegetation that covers the walls and floor; it is brightly lighted with ultraviolet and visible light, and is hot and humid as a greenhouse. The floor is covered with some moist and spongy material, and there is a large artificial pool in the southeast corner of the room (three meters deep). The whole effect is of an unearthly swamp.

The bertlahr has become very jumpy due to the noise being made in Room 14, adjacent to the lair, and so it is likely to attack any human or superhuman intruder.

A concealed door in the southwest corner can be opened by remote control, either from Lyla Raptor's desk upstairs or by a hand-held unit the alien scientist carries. The bertlahr is trained to run out the door when it opens and attack any human not wearing a guard uniform or VIPER lab garb. Unlike the scientist, the bertlahr is not affected by nitrogen in the air.

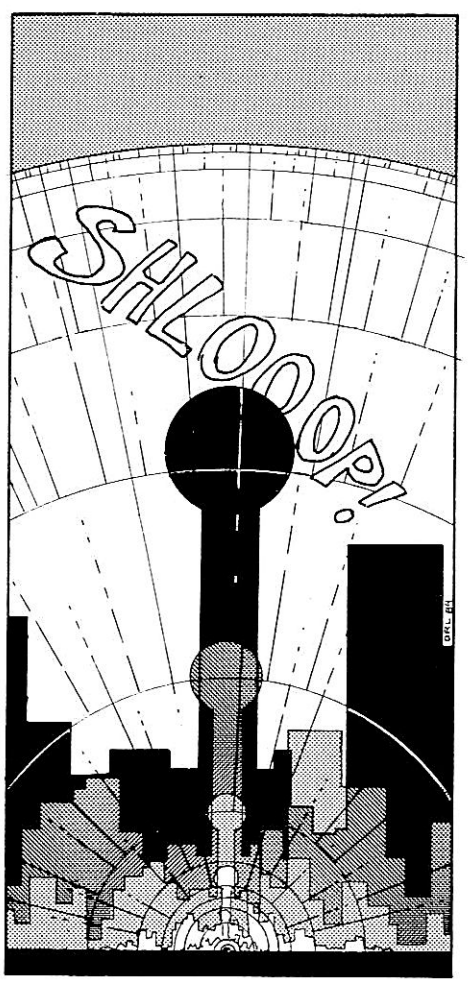
Room 13: Not a room as such, this is a large closet containing huge steel gas tanks that maintain the high-oxygen atmosphere of the alien's quarters and the bertlahr room. These tanks have advanced safety features that keep them from exploding under any circumstances.

Room 14: Delivery area. A raised platform in the center of the room holds an enormous wooden crate, which is surrounded by the entire staff of the underground lab: ten generic ordinary lab technicians in gray-green smocks and gas masks, two guards in VIPER uniforms, also masked and carrying laser rifles, and the alien scientist, wearing nothing but his scaly purple skin and a utility-belt affair with a holster for his weapon (see the appendix for the alien's descriptions and statistics).

The technicians are loading the crate onto a large truck, sitting with its motor running on the underground ramp leading up to B on the surface (exterior map). If heroes show up, the technicians will hurry to finish their loading while the guards and the alien hold off the intruders. It will take the technicians 30 seconds to complete the loading (they've been at it awhile already), and another 30 seconds for the truck to barrel up the ramp and onto the surface, where it will speed away at about 100 mph if pursued.

Though completely open to the south now, the room is ordinarily closed to the south by a sliding metal door of plate armor strength. Stray lumber and carpentry tools are strewn about the room.

The wooden crate is about 5 meters x 3 x 3. It is labelled on all sides "Z1000 H.A.R.T. Grandfather Clocks." Inside is a fiendish device intended to bring about the biggest extortion scheme in VIPER history: the recently-completed Gravimetric Bomb. Once delivered to its hiding place in Dallas, Texas (a basement beneath the largest police station), it will lie hidden while VIPER leaders broadcast a demand for a twenty-billion-dollar ransom. If the ransom is not paid within a week, the bomb will be detonated, destroying Dallas by rapid gravitational collapse of the area to the size of a softball.



APPENDIX
One From the H.A.R.T. Statistics for *Champions*

Part One: H.A.R.T. Break

Harry McCannis, VIPER agent in charge

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
15	STR	3	SPD
14	DEX	6	REC
13	CON	26	END
10	BODY	25	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 5	
10	PRE	DCV: 5	
8	COM	ECV: 3	
6	PD	PHA: 4, 8, 12	
4	ED		

Cost	Skills/Equipment
3	1 lvl w/Firearm
15	Martial Arts (5D6 punch, 6D6 kick)
3	Streetwise −11
17	Laser Carbine 1½D6 K single-shot 30 charges

DISADV 50+

Hunted by police 11−	20

32 (CHA Cost) + 38 (Skill Cost) = 70 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

Moe Svenson, Larry Haines, Charlie "Curly" Adamson

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
10	STR	2	SPD
11	DEX	5	REC
13	CON	26	END
10	BODY	22	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 4	
10	PRE	DCV: 4	
8	COM	ECV: 3	
4	PD	PHA: 6, 12	
3	ED		

Cost	Skills/Equipment
3	1 lvl w/firearm
5	Pistol 1D6K single shot 6 shots

12 (CHA Cost) + 8 (Skill Cost) = 20 (Total Cost)

(*GM Note:* These statistics also apply to Cliff Noel, the bartender in part three.)

Lenny Jaimeson, David Hasselmeyer

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
13	STR	3	SPD
11	DEX	5	REC
13	CON	26	END
10	BODY	24	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 4	
10	PRE	DCV: 4	
8	COM	ECV: 3	
5	PD	PHA: 4, 8, 12	
5	ED		

Cost	Skills/Equipment
3	1 lvl w/Firearm
17	Hvy Pistol 1D6K+1 semi-auto 30 shot/clips

22 (CHA Cost) + 20 (Skill Cost) = (Total Cost)

(*GM Note:* Use these stats for Leonard Moniy, the VIPER agent in part three.)

Part Two: Station Break

Zeke Zeppelin

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
10	STR	2	SPD
11	DEX	5	REC
13	CON	26	END
10	BODY	22	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 4	
10	PRE	DCV: 4	
10	COM	ECV: 3	
4	PD	PHA: 6, 12	
3	ED		

Cost	Skills/Equipment
24	Semiautomatic Blaster Carbine 5D6 EB −1 per 4" 30 shots
16	LAW (Light Anti-tank Weapon) 4D6K 1 shot − per 4"
9	Combat Driver 14−

DISADV 50+

Arrogant	10

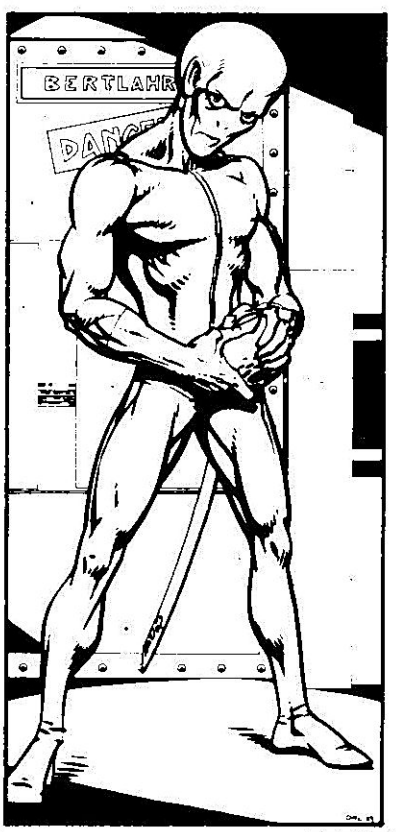
11 (CHA Cost) + 49 (Power/Skill Cost) = 60 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

Black Scout

Samuel Pennywise was a fair amateur fencer but otherwise a nobody before the UFO picked him up one dark night in the countryside. The alien scientist who was designing weapons for VIPER needed a stooge to take care of the alien monsters called bertlahrs; that Pennywise made a good experimental subject for the alien race's genetic research was a bonus. Through a process of "retroactive DNA recombination," Sam's body was hurled forward millions of years in evolutionary development, making him a genetically re-crafted superman: Black Scout. How unfortunate, then, to find that the alien had also instilled in him an artificial — but consuming — addiction to the bertlahr fungus which was the main food of the alien himself.

Despite his advanced development, Black Scout remains in thrall to the alien: arrogant and superior to his human peers, yet bossed around like a primitive animal by the alien. When he recalls that, in addition to all this, he's also wanted by a major international police force (UNTIL, in ***Champions***) and by the curators of the Smithsonian Institution, who will try virtually anything to stuff and display him in the Museum of Natural History — well, Black Scout feels only grief and rage at his isolation.

Champions statistics for Black Scout:



VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
30	STR	5	SPD
30	DEX	10	REC
20	CON	40	END
25	BODY	50	STUN
20	INT		
20	EGO	OCV: 10	
20	PRE	DCV: 10	
8	COM	ECV: 7	
17	PD	PHA: 3, 5, 8,	
15	ED	10, 12	

Cost	Powers/Skills
12	Sword, 1½D6 HKA (3D6 w/STR)
7	Stealth, 14−
10	Acrobatics, 13−
30	Martial Arts (9D6 Punch, 12D6 Kick)

DISADV 100+

Overconfident	20
Arrogant toward normals	10
Dependence on bertlahr fungus	10
2 lvls Unluck	10
Hunted UNTIL, 11−	30
Hunted Smithsonian Institution, 8−	25
Villain bonus	33

180 (CHA Cost) + 59 (Power Cost) = 239 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

"Machine Gun" Kelly

Same CHA as Zeke Zeppelin

OCV: 4
DCV: 4
ECV: 3
PHA: 6, 12

Cost	Skills/Equipment
9	+3 lvls with MG
52	Machine Gun single shot/Autofire 2½D6 K, −1 per 6"

DISADV 50+

Berserk, sight of blood, 11−	
Recover 11−	20
Experience spent	2

11 (CHA Cost) + 61 (Skill Cost) = 72 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

Lily Garrot

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
10	STR	3	SPD
11	DEX	5	REC
13	CON	26	END
10	BODY	22	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 4	
10	PRE	DCV: 4	
18	COM	ECV: 3	
4	PD	PHA: 4, 8, 12	
3	ED		

Cost	Skills/Equipment
5	Computer Programming 11−
2	Professional Skill: Tactics 11−
7	Hvy Pistol 1D6+1 K 6 shots
10	Bulletproof Vest +6DEF act11−
3	Bureaucratics 11−
15	Martial Arts (4D6 punch, 5D6 kick)

DISADV 50+

Loves to Kill/Torture (Sadist)	10
Fanatically obedient to VIPER	9

27 (CHA Cost) + 42 (Skill Cost) = 69 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

Joe "Ace" Muller

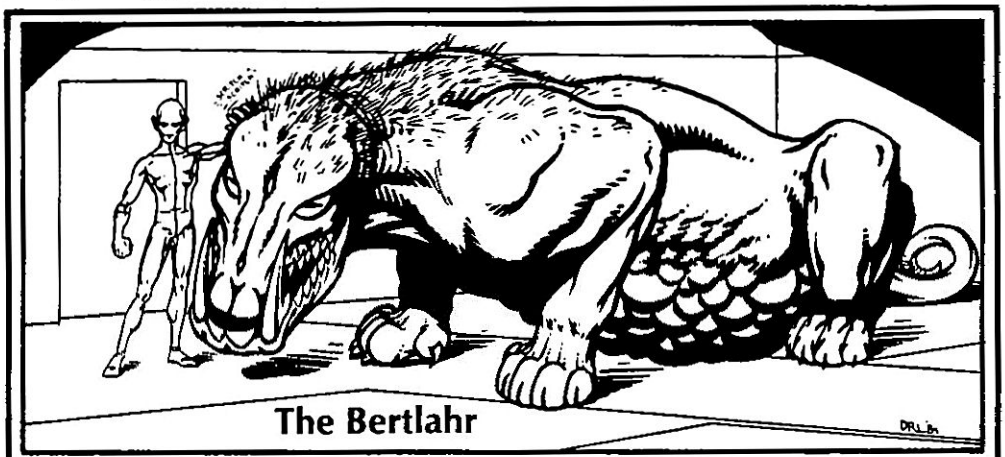
VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
10	STR	2	SPD
10	DEX	4	REC
10	BODY	20	END
18	INT	20	STUN
16	EGO		
10	PRE	OCV: 3	
8	COM	DCV: 3	
3	PD	ECV: 5	
2	ED	PHA: 6, 12	

Cost	Skills/Equipment
5	PRE Defense −20
7	Streetwise 13−
5	Demolitions 12−
3	Escape Artist 11−
10	Shotgun, see *Champions* page 63

Janet Penderton

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
8	STR	2	SPD
10	DEX	4	REC
11	CON	26	END
8	BODY	18	STUN
10	INT		
10	EGO	OCV: 3	
12	PRE	DCV: 3	
16	COM	ECV: 3	
2	PD	PHA: 6, 12	
2	ED		

Cost	Skills
5	Combat Pilot 11−
3	Paramedic 11−
5	Security Systems 11−
2	Professional Skill: Mechanic 11−
5	Detective Work 11−
5	Stealth 11−
10	Acrobatics 11−
10	Luck 2D6



The bertlahr is a huge beast, three meters high at the shoulder and something like a great cat in its body structure . . . that is, a cat with slitted eyes, tusks, a scaly hide, and a huge, bloated abdomen dotted with weird, fungoid growths!

The bertlahr is a predator from the marshes of another planet, brought here by the alien described in part three of this adventure. Its hide is a mottled turquoise, for camouflage in its native vegetation. The beast could lift almost two tons if it had hands (it walks on all fours) and it moves very quickly despite its bulk. Its scaly hide makes effective armor; its principal weapon is a deadly attack with its tusks, which can impale sheet metal.

Ordinarily the bertlahr is fairly docile — it's been well-fed — and will not attack unless provoked or injured. However, it is obedient to its master's commands (Black Scout in part two; the alien in part three) and will attack to kill on his order. The beast eats nearly anything organic, but prefers meat — and has recently acquired a taste for human flesh. (Now you know what happens to disobedient VIPER agents!) The bertlahr is afraid of fire and vulnerable to fire damage.

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
35	STR	4	SPD
20	DEX	10	REC
20	CON	40	END
22	BODY	46	STUN
8	INT		
9	EGO	OCV: 10	
25	PRE	DCV: 4	
2	COM	ECV: 3	
21	PD	PHA: 3, 6, 9, 12	
21	ED		

Cost	Powers
48	3 lvls Growth (0 END, Always on) (+6" movement, −3" knockbacks, 8x normal mass)
15	HKA, 1D6 (2D6 with STR)
15	½ Damage Resistance
12	14 pts. Ego Defense
5	5 pts. Flash Defense

DISADV 100+

Berserk when hurt; 14−; recover 11−	20
Fear of fire	20
2x BODY from fire	20
Unusual looks	15
Always hungry	10
"Monster bonus"	21

Part Three: A Fistful of Dallas

Lyla Raptor

VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
10	STR	2	SPD
10	DEX	4	REC
12	CON	24	END
10	BODY	21	STUN
15	INT		
13	EGO	OCV: 3	
14	PRE	DCV: 3	
16	COM	ECV: 4	
2	PD	PHA: 6, 12	
2	ED		

Cost	Powers/Skills
2	Professional Skill: Business Administration
5	Linguist: Greek with accent
20	Flight 10" OIF rocket belt
7	Escape Artist 11−
7	Hvy Pistol 1D6+1 K 6 shots

DISADV 50+

Self-centered, untrustworthy, ruthless	9

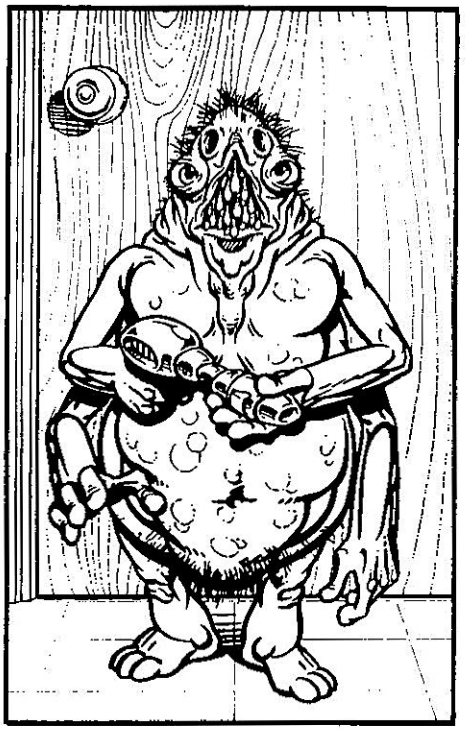
22 (CHA Cost) + 37 (Power/Skill Cost) = 59 (Total Cost) = Disadvantage Total

The Alien Scientist: Veve Jaktren Gimal

Gimal is a scientist-emissary of the kKiervahl race, from a stellar system about 50 light years from Sol. What the players have no way of knowing is that Gimal is a traveller not only in space but in time: he comes from some five centuries in the future, when a vigorously expansionist human civilization is shoving aside the kKiervahl's tyrannical space empire. To allow his race to fulfill its glorious destiny as the worst cutthroats in the galaxy and to stop humanity from becoming the guiding light of the 26th century, Gimal has travelled back in time on orders from his government to start a few dominoes tumbling.

The alien is highly intelligent and remarkably dextrous, but weak in strength and stamina; however, in his native atmosphere his scaly purple skin is nearly invulnerable, giving him great resistance to damage. Though cowardly by nature, he will defend himself well with an advanced alien weapon which has a variety of functions. The gun can fire heat beams, explosive bursts of flame, blinding flashes of light, lethal radiation, and even a tough net of cables that expands on contact with air to entangle its target. Short in stature and ugly beyond belief, the alien is nevertheless capable of hand-to-hand (to-hand-to-hand) combat when forced into it. His real weakness is a susceptibility to nitrogen, which will poison him unless he wears a protective suit (found in his room).

Implanted in the alien's porky little chest is a special emergency device that will keep him from falling into enemy hands. If killed or knocked unconscious, Gimal will be transported automatically back to his own time. Of course, the penalties for failure awaiting him there will be much worse than anything humanity could come up with . . .



VAL	CHA	VAL	CHA
8	STR	5	SPD
17	DEX	10	REC
8	CON	16	END
8	BODY	16	STUN
8	BODY		
23	INT	OCV: 8	
10	PRE	DCV: 8	
6	COM	ECV: 8	
10	PD	PHA: 3, 5, 8,	
10	ED	10, 12	

Cost	Powers/Skills
15	Shrinking, 1 lvl, Always on, 0 END
10	Full Damage Resistance (only works in high-oxygen atmosphere)
30	Multipower Gun — OAF
3	u 9D6 Heat Beam, 15 charges
3	u 9D6 Explosive Flame Burst, 15 charges
3	u 6D6 RKA Laser, 15 charges
3	u 6D6 Flash, 6" radius, 15 charges
3	u 6D6 NND Hard Radiation, defense is Force Field or 20 pts. Life Support, 10 charges
3	u 6D6 Entangle: cables, Def 6, 15 charges
20	Extra Limbs (arms)
7	Scientist: Physics, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, 11−

DISADV 100 +

Unusual looks (!)	20
Cowardly (irrational actions)	20
Distrustful of VIPER	10
Susceptible to nitrogen (1D6)	15
Eats only bertlahr fungus (dependence)	5
Villain bonus	26

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Time travel has always been one of my favorite science fiction subjects. I guess I've always liked the mix of SF and actual (or even semi-fictional) history; the subjects seemed a natural for a science fiction roleplaying game. Yet, until recently, no one seemed to have thought of this. There were two boardgames that used a time travel theme, Yaquinto's ***Time War*** and the late SPI's ***Time Tripper***, but no RPGs on the subject. In fact, the field was so barren, that a couple of local gamers and I actually began to work on a time travel RPG of our own. Then we heard the announcement of ***Timeship***, Yaquinto's upcoming RPG based on time travel. We shelved our own plans, figuring someone had beat us to the punch. Then we saw ***Timeship*** — and it was back to the drawing board.

Timeship is — to me, at least — the ultimate disappointment. While it does indeed involve time travel, it is a roleplaying game only in the loosest terms. Not only that, it can be called science fiction only by stretching *that* term to its limits. What we have instead of hard — or even soft — SF is SF couched in terms of mystical mumbo-jumbo. Even the term "science fantasy" would be generous if applied to this game. Maybe "pseudo-science fantasy" would be the closest one could come to describing ***Timeship***. I cringe to see one of my favorite subjects treated so.

Now that I've no doubt incurred the wrath of ***Timeship*** designer Herbie Brennan (who, I recall, wrote a scathing reply to the *SG* review of his ***Man, Myth and Magic*** simply because the reviewer had never seen any of Mr. Brennan's published books), let me give the game its due and tell about some of its (few) good points. As far as production and components go, ***Timeship*** is top-notch. The box cover is quite attractive, if a bit gaudy, and the game is respectably heavy (in terms of weight) for its $12 retail price — though much of that weight comes from the thick pad of character record sheets. Inside is a 48-page "rule" book (the adjective is more an honorary one than anything else) that also contains three adventures, a handsome GM screen, the pad of character sheets, a folded sheet of maps and illustrations from the adventures, and two percentile dice — not bad, really. If the actual game were as good as the production behind it, I might have had no complaints.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Let's take a look at that 48-page rulebook. First, more than half of the book — a full 24½ pages — is taken up by the adventures. Of the rest: The first two pages are the cover and a table of contents; the next three cover the introduction and a "history" of the "discovery" of the Timeship; and the next *four* are the "Timeship Operating Manual" — which consists of paragraph after paragraph of mystical mumbo-jumbo, liberally punctuated with the salutation "Timelord!" (the ***Timeship*** GM). This section also includes a responsive litany that is apparently intended for recitation before each game, from which a modicum of rules may be gleaned if one can get past the mystical garbage. After all *this* comes the actual rules — eight and a half pages worth, of which five are totally or partially taken up by charts and lists — called "Commentaries on the Timeship, by its Editor and Translator, J.H. Brennan." This is followed by a four-page section titled "The Timelord's Book of Secrets, by Herbie Brennan." The Book of Secrets is mostly a collection of bits of advice to the GM, designer's notes, and a sprinkling of extra rules, some of which contradict those in other places. The back page of the rulebook tells how to complete the ***Timeship*** personal data sheet. This is the only place in the game that most of the character-generation rules can be found. The GM screen also contains rules not to be found elsewhere in the game — some, such as those on "wild talents" (psionics), being little more than guidelines for the GM.

For those who may have been misled by the name of the game, the "Timeship" of the title is *not* a vehicle of any sort — nor any other technological device at all. The Timeship is a scroll, supposedly discovered at an archeological dig near the biblical city of Jericho, which when translated (by Mr. Brennan) revealed mental techniques and disciplines that enable humans to apply personal and group energy to open gates into other times. The scroll is said to be a copy of the original, transported to ancient Sumer by a long-dead alien race, and eventually deposited in Palestine. And, as previously noted, the technique is couched in terms of mysticism so thick you could cut it with a scimitar.

I guess this is where ***Timeship*** really turned me off (even before I got to the rules section). Now I don't absolutely insist that my SF be strictly realistic — a little fantasy tossed in here and there has never deterred me, as long as it isn't excessive. But this . . . ! Some examples: "Greetings, Timelord! Great are your powers, greater your responsibilities. In your hands are the secrets of the timestream . . . Within the ***Timeship*** you will find a screen. Place it before you on the table as your shield . . . This is the Screen of Power, the screen of Mystery, sometimes called the screen of Conjuration." (Translation: The GM screen.) Or this: "Within the ***Timeship*** are two coloured spheres of many facets. One

is the Greater Sphere of Color. The other is the Lesser Sphere of White. Each member of your group must now engage upon the Rolling of the Spheres. By our arts we have embodied in the Spheres energy sufficient for each time trip. The digits on the coloured Sphere each represent 10 units of the Energy. The digits on the White Sphere each represent one unit of the Energy. The Spheres must be rolled together for the Energy to generate . . . Each member of your group must roll the Spheres three times. The total Energy generated is his alone." And so on, for several more paragraphs. All this — and more — just to say "roll percentile dice three times and add the total for a character's personal energy"? Come on, Mr. Brennan, give us a break!

Even worse is the admonition that in preparing to run the game the Timelord should place his table on an east-west axis, face east, place a lighted candle before his "Screen of Conjuration," dim the lights and recite the litany with the players before they step through the gateway into their Time Capsule (what ***Timeship*** adventures are called). This smacks of some of the worst misconceptions the media and general nongaming public have of roleplaying, as portrayed in such tripe as Rona Jaffe's *Mazes and Monsters*. I've *never* seen or heard of a roleplaying group that engages in such inanities — and I hope I never do, in spite of Mr. Brennan's apparent wishes.

Yet in spite of all the mystical nonsense in the introduction and "operating manual," I could have put up with ***Timeship***'s conception of time travel, had the game had any *rules* worthy of the term. ***Timeship*** has to have the least informative set of rules since the original ***D&D***. The rules are brief, poorly organized, contradictory, and, in the area of character generation, inadequate. In most instances, the "rules" are little more than guidelines.

In his designer's notes, Mr. Brennan talks about "run-of-the-mill" RPGs that are so complex they become almost unplayable. While I agree there are some RPGs like this, I cannot go along with his "almost no rules are better" philosophy. Rather than making things easier for the GM, as he claims, having so few rules to fall back on actually makes *more* work for GMs, as they are forced either to invent rules on the spot to cover the game's lack, or else discontinue play. ***Timeship*** carries this to the extreme. A GM faced with the problem of deciding whether or not a player character can perform a certain act, such as picking a lock, is instructed to determine if the *player* could do it. If so, the character can; if not, the character can't (or should be given a small percentage chance).

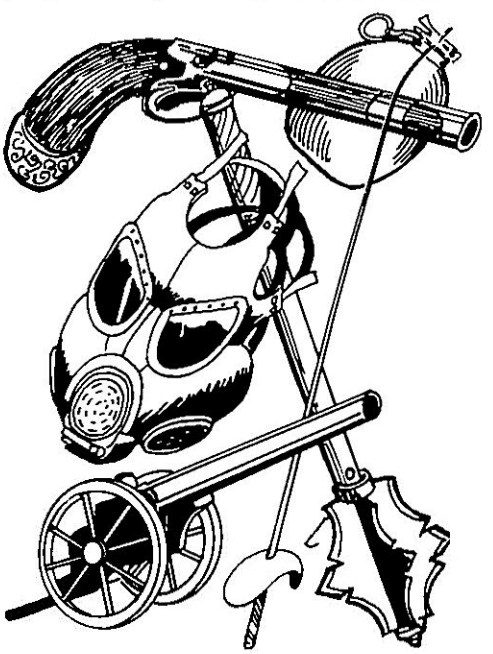
Well, I suppose that's fine — *if* the GM knows everything about the players' skills and abilities, which seems highly unlikely unless they've been chums for years. (I've known several of the regulars in my playing group for more than two years, yet I'd be hard-pressed to tell just what they could or couldn't do in many areas.) Mr. Brennan's solution to this is for the GM to *ask* the player, and give him the benefit of the doubt if he can't prove otherwise. Trust is a fine thing, but how many players do you know who wouldn't, in the heat of the game, fudge *just a little* so a character could succeed at a task? All I can say is that Mr. Brennan's players must be an extraordinarily mature lot never to have felt the temptation to cheat just a bit to get a better chance on a roll here or there. If he runs games like he writes them, they've had ample opportunity to do so.

Character generation is another sore spot. For one thing, players are supposed to play *themselves* rather than randomly created characters, a concept of which Mr. Brennan seems particularly enamored. (This is one of his excuses for the lack of rules: If the players are themselves there's no need for rules on how to do things — the GM should know if they can do them or not and allow actions on that basis.) Well, fine, except that all the RPGers I know play roleplaying games so they can portray characters who can do things the players themselves ordinarily can't. I'm myself six days a week; on the seventh I'd like a stab at being something I'm not — a superbeing, a highly trained mercenary, or a daring investigator, for example. One of the players in my regular group can't walk without crutches — he doesn't play RPGs to have to carry them around with him on an adventure, as the "play yourself" philosophy behind ***Timeship*** would require. And unlike ***Villains & Vigilantes***, another game that uses the player-as-character concept, there are no provisions for rolling characters up randomly. (One reason for this allowance in ***V&V*** is for creating new characters once your first "self" is killed. In ***Timeship***, characters can be killed, but the only penalty is a loss of permanent energy — next game, the dead player character is right back there in play. If anything, such automatic resurrections cheapen the value of good and careful play and make risk-taking a meaningless farce — why worry if the character you've spent so much effort on dies, when the effect is minimal?)

Character generation is further muddied by inadequate explanation. In the body of the rules (including the mumbo-jumbo section), a character is defined only by three percentile rolls of personal energy and two percentile rolls of combat reserve. Combat reserve takes damage until it is gone. After that, further hits are removed from personal energy. (When that's gone, either from usage or damage, the character "dies" — until next game session.) The personal energy totals of the entire group are combined to obtain group energy. Group energy is used to open gates into the timestream, transport heavy equipment and so on. Personal energy may be used to transport personal weapons and effects (apparently it "creates" them as well), create period clothing, heal wounds (even regenerate lost limbs), and allow characters to shapechange — changes of features, skin color, race, even sex or species.

It isn't until the last page of the rulebook, upon completing the personal data sheet, that one learns a character also has physical abilities — speed, endurance, intelligence, strength, dexterity, agility, running ability, and jumping ability. These are only listed on the data sheet itself. They all start at an average of 50, with players getting an extra 50 points to increase them as they see fit, based on their own abilities. The GM screen contains conversions of running and jumping ability to distances, though how these were derived is unexplained. Definitions of these abilities would have been helpful; while most are self-evident, the difference between dexterity and agility is less than clear, as various other games use the two terms interchangeably. This section also gives "to-hit" numbers for various weapon types in the game. These start at 60, and players may then raise or lower the various weapon skills based on their own familiarity with these weapons. (Again, the GM is going to have to trust the players not to fudge on any of these values.) These values, once determined, are permanent and never change for the player character. Personal energy and combat reserve, however, are rolled anew for *each* new adventure — which, I suppose, is one reason for all the character data sheets (printed identically front and back) included in the game. Permanent energy is awarded for successfully completing a time capsule, but can be lost if a character is killed (going into negatives if no permanent energy has been stored up).

Combat in ***Timeship*** is relatively simple and surprisingly adequate considering the rest of the rules. To hit a target, you must roll above your to-hit number with whatever weapon you're using. The target takes a number of



hits equal to the number rolled minus your to-hit number, plus the weapon's damage modifier. Armor subtracts from the damage. Simple, but workable. The GM screen provides a fair list of to-hit modifiers. Making an attack costs one point of personal energy, as does attempting to avoid one, which makes the to-hit number higher — not overly realistic, but playable. Damage subtracts from combat reserve and then from personal energy, but seems to do little else until the character is "dead." As long as personal energy remains, limbless torsos remain alive, severed heads can think and talk, etc.

Weapon lists in ***Timeship*** are adequate,

ranging from medieval melee weapons to 20th-century firearms (though heavy weapons are limited to pre-16th century). Definitions would have been helpful here, however, as some of the terms listed — tripod gun, flicknife (presumably a switchblade), mangonel — may not be familiar to the average gamer. Oddly enough, there are no futuristic weapons, despite characters' ability to travel into the future.

Except for a few extra clues to almost non-existent rules, the Timelord section of the book is pretty much a waste. Experienced GMs won't need the advice given; novice GMs won't find enough here to be of any real assistance in learning how to run a game of ***Timeship*** or to create time capsules of their own.

Of the three scenarios provided with the game, two are what the author calls "task capsules" and one is an "adventure capsule." The former require the players to perform a certain task, and they cannot leave via an exit gate until they do. In the latter, the players are free to wander around until they tire of adventuring and find an exit gate to leave. The first of the capsules, ***Murder at the End of Time***, is a task capsule. It is also the most ridiculous roleplaying adventure I've ever seen. Even though it takes place in the far future with the sun almost dead and the earth no longer rotating on its axis, the capsule's complete ignorance of basic scientific principles is abominable. And the situation is asinine: The players must discover who "murdered" Count Dracula (yes, Dracula!), who insists on following them around as they encounter and interview suspects such as Little Red Riding Orphan, Annie Oakley, Jeeves the butler, and Mafioso Don Guiseppe Caglioni. Even if you decide to give ***Timeship*** a try, I suggest skipping this scenario.

The other two scenarios, ***Destruction of Gomorrah*** and ***Assassinate the Fuhrer*** (the other task capsule), aren't too bad and might be playable if they had a set of rules to go with them (in spite of a stupid von Danikenesque cause for Gomorrah's destruction and some questionable historical points in ***Fuhrer***). ***Gomorrah*** is particularly refreshing in its R-rated approach, and several of the encounters could be quite interesting. If a set of playable time-travel rules turns up elsewhere I may eventually be able to run these.

It is the scenarios, however, that point up another of ***Timeship***'s biggest problems: its concept of the nature of time. This very important facet of any system dealing with time travel is totally ignored in the rules. Is history fixed, so that nothing the player characters do can really change it? From ***Gomorrah*** one might get this impression, as the city will be destroyed no matter what the players do. However, the concept behind ***Fuhrer*** seems to allow for the development of an alternate history if the players don't assasinate Hitler. So what happens if they fail, which is possible in that scenario? Does time change? Or are the players and their actions part of the immutable timestream, meaning they can't fail? (The latter would take out a lot of the suspense, if true.) These questions aren't even broached, except by implication, in the scenarios — and the apparent answers are contradictory. And just who assigned the players to assassinate Hitler anyway? ("What do you want to do this weekend?" "Oh, I dunno. Let's go kill Hitler.") There is a one-sixth page section on a Time Travellers' Guild, but this seems to be more of an aid and assistance society than any sort of order-giving force. The complete lack of guidelines on the nature of the timestream and how to prevent player-characters from wantonly raping history may be ***Timeship***'s biggest flaw.

The final analysis (need you ask)? As much as I enjoy time travel and would like to roleplay such journeys into the past and future, I can hardly recommend ***Timeship***. Unless you're prepared to do a *lot* of work rewriting and making up rules, you're best off waiting for someone else to take a shot at a time travel RPG. From what I hear, several more such games are in the works. For the time being, however, it's into the closet for ***Timeship***.

Timeship *(Yaquinto); $12. Designed by Herbie Brennan. 48-page rulebook, pad of character record sheets, illustrated mapsheet, gamemaster's screen, two percentile dice, boxed. Playing time indefinite. Published 1983.* **SG**

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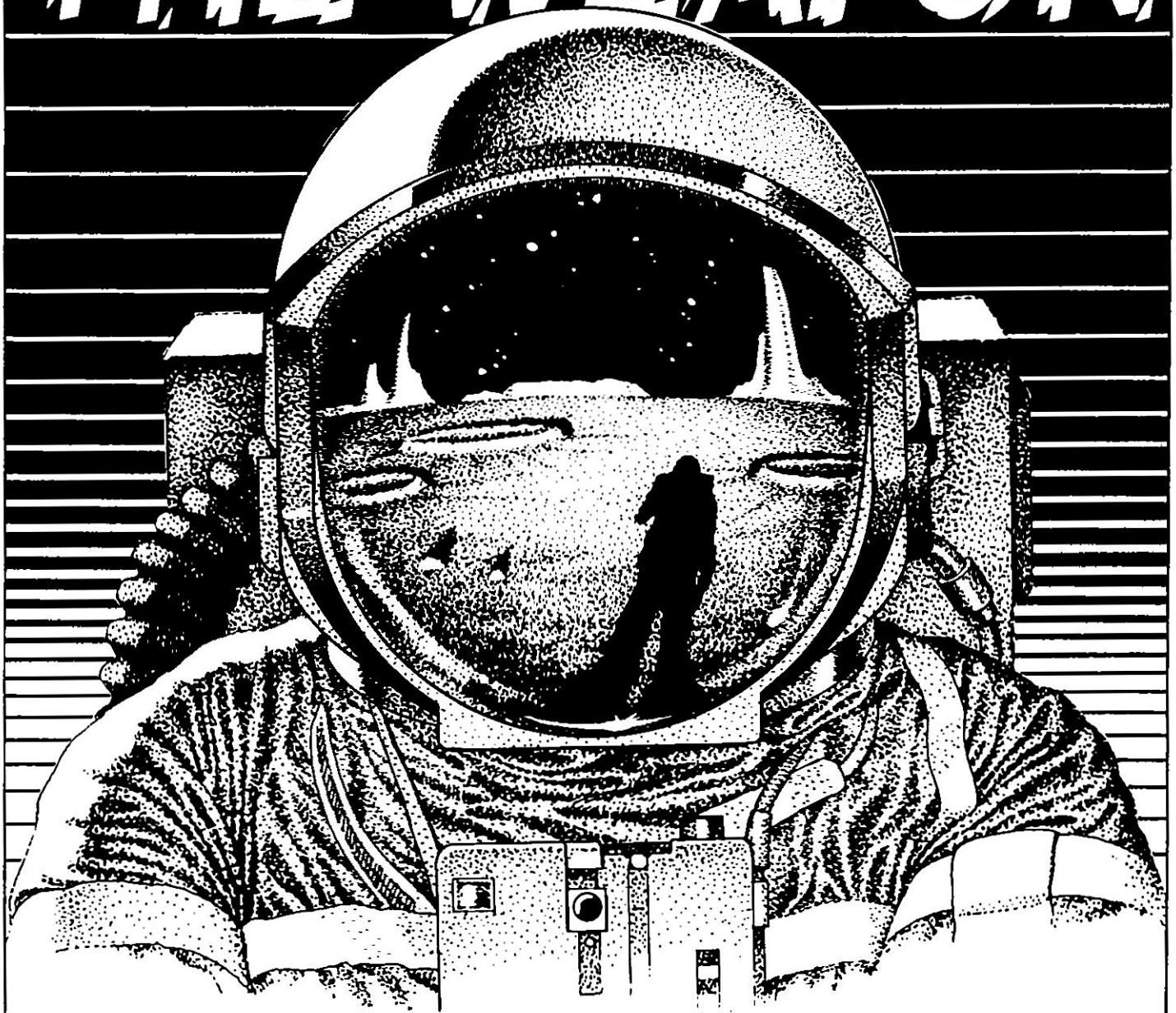

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4 SIGHT

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46 Police Station: For more information about the Hampshire disappearance, on Thursday, go to 32. On Friday, you can go to 22. On Saturday, go to
If you don't visit the police station on any given day, you can
l (and follow up) all the paragraphs for Thursday on Friday, Thursday and Friday on Saturday, and so on – just assume
're talking to your old friend Captain Clarke (or dropping his
ıe around the police station) and getting "old news."
47
hour per roll. Once you get over the wall, go to 24.
48 A stone with highly unusual properties. It emits radio waves that can be received by the brain. Absolutely
edible. They ask where
it.
here, did you?
50 Town Hall: Open only 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. You find an old book; go to 1 and return here. Take an hour and make a LUCK roll (13). Make an IDEA roll and take
ther hour (41). Make a
HIDDEN (no extra time) (44).
51 Some old folks snoring away. You can try another room. Roll 1D10. If the die roll is lower than the
. If you make it, go to 67.
52 Not Flagg, judging by the name card, at least. You can try another room. Roll 1D10. If the die roll is lower than the number of squares you were trying
157 Go to 97
158 Go to 98
159 Go to 95
160 o to 97
161 Give you solving le
what you must do to s
162 Go to 18
He grabs break fre and can
not succeed within 1
until Monday. You
will have lost 1D10 ho
164 If you w to fight

The Fiction They Deserve

by Charles Platt

Reprinted from *Science Fiction Review*, No. 50 (Spring 1984). Used by permission.

Many people seem unaware that interactive fiction has already become an important subsection of science fiction. For these blissfully naive souls, a brief recap:

The first successful example in book publishing was Bantam's *Choose Your Own Adventure* Series. Devised by a New England school teacher to entertain his kids, each novel consists of episodes one or two pages long, each culminating in a choice such as 1: *Fire the ray gun*, or 2: *Run away*. Depending on which option you choose, you are told to skip to a different page in the book. There is then another choice, and another, as the narrative branches again. Most paths through the book are six to ten episodes long, and most of them end with the hero getting zapped. The challenge is to find an ending in which he survives.

Interactive computer fiction is usually more complicated than the *Choose Your Own Adventure* type of book. The text is encoded on a disk; the computer displays it on a video screen, and the user types choices on the keyboard. Typically, you're a knight trying to rescue a princess, or an explorer trying to find gold and you have to get out of an underground maze, fight demons, slay dragons and so on and so forth. You type your instructions in a primitive form of English: *Stab Wizard* or *Open Door* or *Climb Over Wall*. The program compares your instructions with its built-in vocabulary and jumps to an appropriate part of the story in response.

Most computer stories of this type are guessing games, and like the books, they are tests of survival. Whenever you make a mistake you get zapped, and must start all over again; thus, you learn the correct plot choices the hard way and it can take several *days* to master a typical computer adventure.

The arcade game ***Dragon's Lair*** was the first attempt to dramatize this concept via a video disk, effectively putting the player in charge of the outcome of an animated movie. It has been highly successful; already there are imitators. It seems that in this field, as in prime-time television, something that was originally devised to appeal to kids can be quickly (albeit marginally) modified to sell to adults.

Several science fiction people are now involved with interactive fiction. At one end of the scale we have Byron Preiss employing quantity-writers at modest wages to crank out *Choose Your Own Adventure* imitations — or spinoffs — for the juvenile audience, ages 10 to 20. At the other end of the scale (and if you complain that this isn't a very broad scale, I suppose I must agree) we find James Baen employing more widely known and respected writers (e.g., Janet Morris) to adapt existing science fiction novels or write new ones in the interactive format, for the adult audience, ages 15 to 30.

When I ran into Joe Haldeman at the world convention, he was negotiating with Infocom, the most successful publisher of interactive computer fiction. When I talked to Tom Disch recently, he was selling some sort of multiple-choice computer adventure to Harper and Row. We seem to be seeing the beginning here of a whole new genre, in which the reader ceases to be a mere passive recipient and becomes a collaborator. And most people seem to think that this is a great idea.

Well, it isn't. First of all, interactive fiction doesn't really make the reader any more creative. You can only choose between alternatives that have been pre-set by the writer; you can't invent new paths through a story any more than you can invent new answers to questions in a multiple-choice test.

More to the point, interactive fiction, by its very nature, has to be episodic, codified, and trivial. It is a big step away from characterization and subtlety, in a field where these qualities were already scarce.

Before I argue further, I should mention my own background. I'm not generally hostile to literary innovation or computer technology; I like to see experiments in fiction, and I enjoy computers enough to have sold many game programs and four nonfiction books on the subject. Nor am I arguing in a spirit of sour grapes; true, no one has asked me to write interactive fiction of my own, but actually I sold my first (and only) interactive story back in 1971, before *Choose Your Own Adventure* had even been thought of. My effort was titled "Norman vs. America" and appeared in the fourth and last issue of *Quark*, a quarterly edited by Samuel Delany and Marilyn Hacker. The interactive form seemed frivolous to me, so I did it as a comic strip in which a naive young man had to choose between ludicrous options: whether to shoplift from Macy's or go to a rock concert; whether to become a dope dealer or a dildo manufacturer; and so on. It was reprinted subsequently in an avant-garde anthology, praised briefly in *The New York Times*, and subsequently translated into Swedish. Then, appropriately, it died. Since it seemed an inherently trivial form, I never did any more with it. Had someone told me that ten years later it would become a hot trend in publishing, I would have been incredulous.

Without wanting to sound old-fashioned, I believe that to be memorable and important, fiction must have structure, must be built around living, breathing characters of depth, must be carefully paced, and should move through a series of revelations to an ending which, in retrospect, has a sense of inevitability. It is the business of a writer to learn to control these elements, consciously or unconsciously, and this is not a trivial matter. Structure, in particular, is both elusive and fundamental.

Now, in one sense, interactive fiction is highly structured. The writer must plan out a complicated web of possible paths that branch and rejoin without loops, paradoxes or contradictions. The logic required is similar to that in writing a computer program.

But this is not structure in a literary sense. Indeed, by its very nature, interactive fiction can have no literary structure at all. The action must be divided into short episodes, each culminating in two or three simple alternatives for the reader. To make a good game, the alternatives must seem more-or-less evenly weighted; thus there can be no sense of events growing inevitably out of previous events, or evolving from the motives and nature of the characters.

Plot becomes a whimsical series of yes/no decisions, and the eventual outcome is likewise reduced to the most primitive level: the hero either lives or dies.

Since plot no longer grows from character, characterization is unnecessary in interactive fiction. This is just as well, since there usually isn't room for it. Within the length of a book or the width of a computer disk, there must be dozens of separate adventure paths, many of them branching into dead ends. As a result, the length of any one path will seldom be more than 1000 words. No room for memorable characters and complex interactions between them. No room for atmosphere, drama and narrative intensity. There is room only for briefly described scenes, and two-dimensional menacing figures that precipitate crises for the reader to resolve by selecting Option 1 or Option 2.

Interactive fiction, then, cannot be good literature. But it cannot even be good adventure. An engrossing adventure usually achieves its effects by building a complex plot, full of false trails, twists, and revelations. The protagonist uses resourcefulness and cunning to solve each problem, in ways that are unexpected yet consistent with his skills and character. Ultimately, there is a climax and a visceral, cathartic payoff.

None of this is possible in interactive fiction. The hero becomes a mere figure, like a chess piece, moving from one incident to the next. Watch someone playing *Dragon's Lair* and ask *why* the knight must jump onto the second wooden bridge, not the first. These "correct" moves cannot be deduced from the character of the hero, the story so far, or the environment in which it takes place. The pattern is random.

Why then is interactive fiction so popular? First, its short segments suit the attention span of video kids raised on half-hour TV cartroons subdivided by half-minute commercials. Continuity is no longer a virtue.

Second, by reducing life to a series of arbitrary yes/no decisions, all the disturbing complexities of the real world are eliminated in favor of a codified scenario even more reassuringly simple-minded than that of a typical fantasy novel.

Third, the lack of characterization becomes an advantage, rather than a problem. Most computer adventures are no longer written about a protagonist; they are written in the second person, about the reader. "You" are stuck in the labyrinth; "you" must decide whether to slay the dragon or run for cover. The idea of a central figure with interesting, complex motivations has been discarded on the assumption that readers are less interested in other people than in themselves. Thus interactive fiction is a fine form for members of the Me Decade.

And so the job of the writer is no longer to build a balanced, integrated whole, with dramatic events and consequences relevant to reality. The job is now to devise multiple-choice games that put readers in the starring role, free to demand whatever they want.

The result can only be the fiction they deserve.

A Reply

by Allen Varney

66 From 1880: a map
of the outer caverns
showing where they
were sealed with dynami
tremors stopped, the report
says. You can take the map
and use it if you need to. If
course, it wasn't my place to mention it. Girls these days are so
careless. Why, when I was a girl . . .
76 You see
slimy an
tacles: I
two-point armor. I
STR point per rou
one point anyway
second round with

The food for thought here is tasty indeed. Charles Platt's close and cogent argument articulates, much better than I could, some of my own thoughts about so-called "interactive fiction." Given the direction his piece takes, it is persuasive, even inarguable — but only so far as we agree with that general direction. I differ with Mr. Platt regarding two of his key assumptions.

The first is that readers enjoy such interactive work because it offers short, sharp doses of simple narrative fiction, free of obstacles like worthwhile characterization. But it seems obvious that the audience for juvenile series like *Choose Your Own Adventure* books (Bantam) or *Endless Quest* (TSR, Inc.) reads them in an altogether different frame of mind: treating the books, not as fiction, but as games. Make the right choices and you win a happy ending. In fact, the books based on Infocom's *Zork* computer adventures, though otherwise identical in format to *CYOA*, give a point total at the end of each branch narrative, showing how well the reader did solving the puzzles.

This undermines Mr. Platt's conclusion to the extent that "interactive fiction" (an unfortunate name) is not a substitute for conventional literature; it does not appeal to the same needs in the reader, any more than you would always rather play chess than read John Brunner's "chess novel" *The Squares of the City*. The pursuits do not conflict. Now, we may harbor apprehensions that the *form* of storytelling is being adapted toward "trivial" ends, and that a generation of young readers may grow up never realizing that fiction can be more than a game, but this seems to me a social question and not a literary one. My point remains: "Interactive fiction," despite nomenclature and appearance, is not fiction and so should not be judged by literary standards.

I ask Mr. Platt to consider murder mysteries. Not Chandler and Hammett and Cain, but the rank-and-file whodunits. They are as a rule good at establishing a sense of place, and sometimes the revelation of motive provides interesting glosses on human nature, but surely no one proposes that people read all those crime-drama paperbacks for the same reasons they read *David Copperfield*. They do not buy their sixtieth Agatha Christie to gain ever more subtle insights into Hercule Poirot's mercurial nature. Readers do not come away from Catharine Aird or P.D. James changed and enlightened. Yet these crime novels are respectfully reviewed in *The New Yorker*; scratch any English professor and find a Sherlock Holmes fan underneath. Why? Because — and this goes right to my thesis about "interactive fiction" — they read these mysteries, by and large, in the spirit of genial competition with the authors, amusing themselves by attempting to spot clues and solve the crime before the solution is revealed. Though the readers may often have remarkably refined tastes in literature, they thrive on the mystery's non-"literary" premise because they approach it from a different angle. Ditto "interactive fiction."

Now to the other point where I believe Mr. Platt is mistaken: the explicitly-stated generalization that "interactive fiction, then, cannot be literature." Here I should repeat my admiration for the clarity and logic of his argument — his analysis of structure in particular is perceptive — but all he has proven by it is that *CYOA* and *Endless Quest* books (*specifically*) cannot be literature. I'd say this is self-evident: Those dismal little thousand-word narratives, with their simple choices every page, would be poor excuses for stories . . . if they were attempting to be stories and not games.

But to proceed from this to Mr. Platt's sweeping conclusion is surely a mistake. The "interactivity" principle is flexible; for practical purposes it is a new form, and we haven't seen all of what it can do yet. All I concede is that the principle itself is not suitable as a vehicle for great literary statements — but *unsuitable* and *impossible* are two different judgements.

To demonstrate this point, let me advance an extreme example. Imagine an author who has written a novel which requires a sequel. (Stipulate for the sake of argument that a sequel to a properly-written novel *can* sometimes be required, or at least be worthwhile.) But suppose the author cannot decide in which of two equally plausible and desirable directions the narrative should proceed — and so he or she writes *both* of them, as separate and independent novel-length follow-ups to the original narrative. Perhaps one is an upbeat ending, spreading sweetness and light, while the other is more naturalistic and/or depressing. Or perhaps the writer wishes to develop a single character in completely opposite directions. Whatever.

Will Mr. Platt declare, without qualification, that one of these two sequels will *positively* be better and more artistically satisfying than the other — which would (of course) be utterly worthless? If Mr. Platt will *not* propose such a blanket endorsement of one over the other — which would be risky, I think — then can he say that a reader who *chooses* one sequel over the other is simpleminded and selfish? Or that a "serious" reader should forgo reading *any* of the books in question, because of this single "branch"?

This example, extreme though it may be, illustrates my point: "Interactivity" itself — the notion that the reader may participate in

determining the story's outcome — is not the bugaboo Mr. Platt makes it. Keeping the above "single-branch" example in mind, we can see that his objections deal almost entirely with one specific *format* for interactive fiction — extremely short episodes, numerous branchings, narrative written in the second person, and choices at frequent intervals, with options of the most pedestrian, either/or nature. Nothing inherent in the interactivity principle requires this.

How these questions of aesthetics relate to gaming — in case you thought I forgot which magazine I'm writing for — is that the "interactive fiction" we know today represents a new cross-fertilization (not to say hybridization) of pursuits that up to now have appealed to different, rigidly defined needs. That is, up to now we've been reading stories and playing games, and there's never been trouble separating the two kinds of entertainment. Now the methods and appearance of fiction have been adapted to the needs of gaming; I agree with Mr. Platt to the extent that so far the results have not been encouraging — considered as fiction. But — as I hope I've made clear — it might be useful to reverse the adaptation process, and incorporate some of the virtues of gaming into the methods of fiction. This "interactive fiction," crude as it is, may indicate some of the directions writers (and game designers can go. This direction or that one? The choice is ours. **SG**

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Computerized Dungeon Master

An overview of text adventures

Whether or not interactive adventures can be literature, they are definitely amusing, even addictive games. Their settings range throughout history and into the far future, from stock fantasy backgrounds to genuinely new (or not so new) science-fictional scenarios. Here's a quick look at some of the better ones out to control your computer — and your mind.

Part I: *Text Adventures*

As you probably know, a text adventure puts the program in the role of an endlessly patient (if rather lamebrained) game master. The text display on screen outlines a situation — some programs incorporate graphics as well — then allows you to respond with an action: anything from "Get Key" to "Have Sergeant Smith take the vial to headquarters for analysis," depending on the program's sophistication. The program then tells you what change your action produced and describes the new situation. If it doesn't recognize a particular command, you have to play a guessing game, deciding what it's looking for; it's all part of the puzzle.

You nearly always have some objective goal to reach, but just as often you're not told what it is; you have to blunder around, "dying" repeatedly, before you learn enough to know what you're aiming for. Success usually entails solving a series of puzzles: "How do I get through this door?" "What does that inscription mean?" "Which word will get this infernal machine to do thus-and-such?"

Comic book fans, and those looking for an introductory-level adventure, will be interested in Scott Adams' new "Questprobe" series, being produced in conjunction with Marvel Comics. These twelve connected adventures feature Marvel superheroes, and Marvel is producing a series of comics to accompany them which gives clues to solving the puzzles. These are oriented toward beginners. (No price or publisher information was available at press time.)

Games like the "Questprobe" series and others are useful preparation for the true "monster" text adventures, the ones which, either because of intricacy or sheer gigantic scope, demand highly experienced play — and substantial amounts of time! To see the extremes these sprawling undertakings can reach, look at ***Time Zone*** (Sierra On-Line Systems, $99.95). Ranging through literally dozens of eras in history and into the extreme far future in a colossal scavenger hunt, this time-travel scenario takes up no less than *six* double-density computer disks. Figure the time needed to crack this one in months, if not years.

The chief name in text adventures is certainly Infocom, of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its first release, ***Zork I***, was modelled closely on the venerable *Adventure* program designed at MIT university in the late 1960s; ***Zork***, a fantasy treasure hunt through a huge Underground Empire, is far and away the most popular text game in the brief history of the form and has spawned two sequels. If your taste runs to fantasy and intricate puzzles, you can't go wrong with the ***Zork*** series.

Infocom's other games deal with more topics than dungeon-crawling, though — murder mysteries (***Deadline***, ***The Witness***), desert adventure (***Infidel***), a high-tech planet-saving mission (***Suspended***), and exploring a mysterious alien spacecraft (***Starcross***) are some of your options. All of Infocom's releases are written in a proprietary operating language that features a powerful "sentence parser" — which means that the programs will accept full, grammatical sentences instead of the customary two- and three-word commands most adventures insist on. It's a blessing, and a tremendous boost to the mood and atmosphere of a given plot, to be able to say "Break the lock with the axe and look inside the chest," instead of running through innumerable plodding exchanges like "Break lock — With what? — Axe," etc.

Science fiction fans will want to investigate Infocom's ***Suspended*** (see review in *SG* 68), wherein you're awakened from cryogenic suspension to avert a planetary crisis; there's no one to help you except a crew of six distinctly odd robots (32K disk, $49.95 retail). An earlier SF release, ***Starcross***, puts you at the helm of the spaceship of that name, in 2186 A.D. Your mission: Rendezvous with and investigate a bizarre alien starship. The spacecraft design (not to mention the whole adventure) is pretty clearly based on Arthur Clarke's award-winning novel *Rendezvous With Rama*; *this* ship, however, is still occupied. (32K or 48K depending on system; $39.95.)

Lastly, Infocom's ***Planetfall*** (48K disk, $49.95) is space opera — played for laughs. You're an Ensign 7th Class in the Stellar Patrol ("boldly going where angels fear to tread"), jettisoned from the exploding ship *Feinstein* to land on a strange planet which you must explore. Just one weird robot this time: Floyd, who has (according to Infocom's ad copy) "the mentality of an encyclopedia and the maturity of a nine-year-old." Sounds like a few computer hackers I know . . .

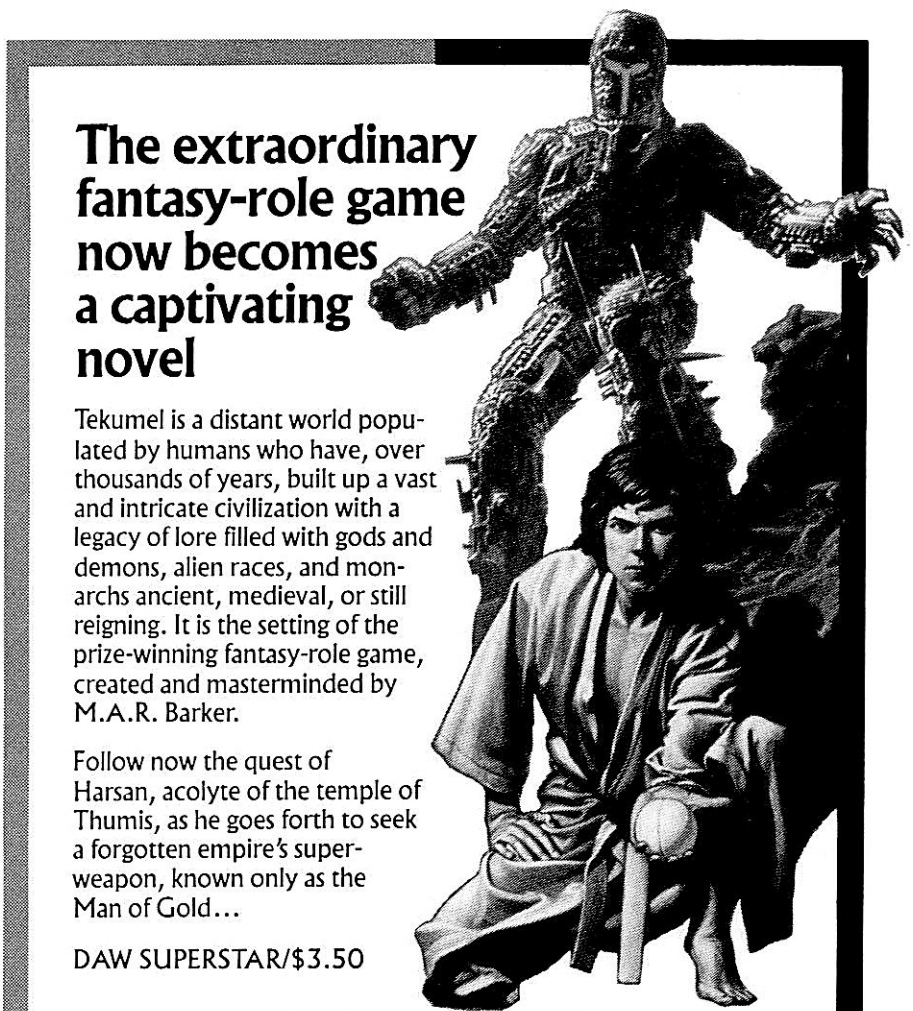
Part II: *"Interactive Fiction" on the Frontier*

Beyond strict text adventures the boundaries between game categories blur and disappear, and experimentation is the watchword. Here we find games that use both words and graphics to put the player into a "story" — in some cases, without using words at all.

The Prisoner (Edu-Ware Services, Inc.; 48K, price not listed) is based on the 1960s Patrick McGoohan television series which has attracted a small but intense cult following. *SG* reviewer Bill Wallace writes that ***The Prisoner*** "is a total delight to play. The graphics in the new version add a great deal to the game. The world of the Island is broken into twenty-plus distinct locations, but unity is achieved through the consistent theme of Orwellian oppression and the player's wide range of choices within the closed environment." But you may not be able to handle it when ***The Prisoner*** starts playing mind games with *you*. For example, what do you do when the computer keyboard starts vibrating beneath your fingertips? And that's just part of the fun . . .

Wings Out of Shadow (Baen Software, 48K, price not listed), reviewed in *SG* 69, represents another hybrid that may be more vital than its parent stock. Author Fred Saberhagen has creatively incorporated the player/reader into his popular Berserker series; your actions in the shoot-em-up sections influence the intervening narratives.

Then there is Electronic Arts' ***Murder on the Zinderneuf*** (48K disk, $39.95), a '30s-style pulp musterly set on a zeppelin. Your character is any one of 15 different stock detectives from the annals of fiction; you get different results in questioning the numerous suspects based on the varying approaches you take in solving the (repeatable) mystery. The "story" verges on pulp standards; the significant point, though, is that ***Murder on the Zinderneuf***, with all its narrative content, *looks* like an arcade game — "you" are represented as a phosphor-dot pattern moving around on the screen from suspect to suspect. What, if anything, does this signify? Are these game "literature"? No. Is there *potential* here, using these forms, for artistic expression beyond mere gameplay — for "interactive fiction"? Well . . . let's say it's a little early to decide either way. Watch this space over the next fifty years. **SG**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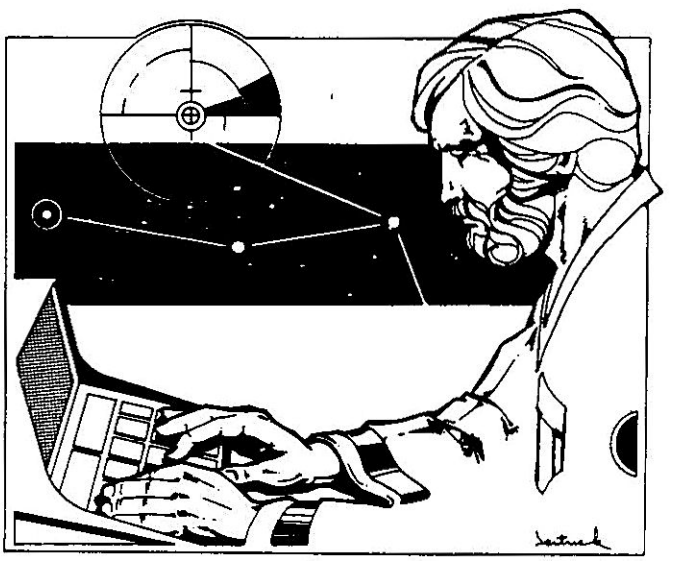
Competitive Citizens

Expanded Character Generation for *Traveller's Citizens of the Imperium*



by Dan Perez

Overheard during character generation for ***Traveller*** in the open gaming room at a recent convention:

"I'd like to be a pirate. I think I'll send my character through 'Pirates' in ***Citizens of the Imperium***."

"No, don't do *that*! Go through ***Mercenary*** or ***High Guard***. You'll get more skills that way."

"Well, I'm not sure . . ."

"Come on! If you go through ***Citizens***, you'll have to settle for one skill every four years. You can get at least twice as many in ***Mercenary*** or ***High Guard***."

"Well, okay."

I suspect this exchange may sound all too familiar to ***Traveller*** referees and players. With the publication of ***Traveller*** Book 6 (***Scouts***), there now exist expanded character generation systems for all the major services in ***Traveller***. Whereas the Basic ***Traveller*** character generation system allows characters to accumulate one skill for each four-year term they serve, these expanded systems (***Mercenary, High Guard, Merchant Prince***, and ***Scouts***) permit characters to gain more skills by allowing them to resolve each four-year term on a year-by-year basis.

This is fine if your players want to run their characters through one of these major services, but what if they want to play different types of characters (like doctors or barbarians, perhaps)? Of course, doctors and barbarians are available in ***Traveller*** Supplement 4, ***Citizens of the Imperium***, along with a variety of other character types. Unfortunately, these characters are not as popular as they might be in campaigns using the expanded generation systems, primarily because ***Citizens*** uses the basic ***Traveller*** generation system.

To illustrate the difference between the basic generation system and the expanded systems, I took two identical characters (UPP: 86A5A9) and ran one through the Rogue service in ***Citizens***. I ran the other through the expanded system in ***Scouts***. Both went through the same number of terms, mustered out, and resolved aging throws. Here are the resultant characters.

Rogue	UPP: 76A6A9	Age 34
4 terms		Cr10,000
Carousing-2, Streetwise-2, Computer-1, Foil-1		
Low Passage Foil Traveller's		

Scout	UPP: 86A5D9	Age 34
4 terms		Cr3,000
Pilot-4, Navigation-1, Vacc suit-1, Admin-1		
Grav vehicle-1, Medical-1, Liaison-1		
Scout ship		

After comparing these two characters, it's easy to see why a player would forfeit his or her desire to run characters out of ***Citizens*** and opt for a system which will produce characters with large skill pools: The ***Traveller*** universe is a Darwinistic one, and characters with larger skill pools are better adapted to survive and prosper.

To solve the problem, I devised a system which allows players to generate characters from ***Citizens*** in such a manner that their skill pools will rival characters generated from the expanded systems. It works by permitting characters going through a service in ***Citizens*** to resolve their four-year terms on a year-by-year basis, rolling once per year for a skill instead of once every four years.

To generate expanded characters from ***Citizens***, begin by generating the character's UPP in accordance with ***Traveller*** rules. After the character has made a successful enlistment roll for the service desired, determine the character's period of service as follows:

Resolve each four-year term on a year-by-year basis. Each year the character will make rolls on 2d6 to determine survival, position, promotion, and skill eligibility. The rolls (and modifiers) for survival, position, and promotion are the same as listed in ***Citizens***; the roll for skill eligibility is 6 or better (this roll applies for all services and is never modified). Characters who make their skill eligibility roll are entitled to roll on the skill tables for a skill that year.

During the first year of the first term, allow the character automatic survival, no position or promotion roll, and two automatic skill rolls (one from the Personal Development table and one from the Service Skills table). This will simulate basic and advanced training and apprenticeships.

Survival

As noted above, survival rolls are the same as listed in ***Citizens***, but the player makes a survival roll for each year but the first. It can be a hassle to start all over again if a player blows a survival roll early in his or her character's career. In order to avoid this kind of hassle, I

allow a player to miss one survival roll and still have the character survive, if the blown roll occurs in the first eight years of service. If a player blows a survival roll after that, I consult the "Unfit for Service" table in Paranoia Press' *Scouts and Assassins*. If you prefer not to have all your *Citizens* characters muster out for less than sterling reasons (or don't own *Scouts and Assassins*), there's always GDW's optional survival rule (outlined in Book 6).

Position and Promotion

After position is attained, the player may roll once each year for promotion. The promotion roll is the same as listed in *Citizens*, but the player must make *two* successful promotion rolls before advancing to the next *Traveller* rank. In addition, a character may advance only one *Traveller* rank per four-year term, regardless of how many successful promotion rolls have been made that term.

Skills

Each year, after survival and position/promotion are determined, the player may roll for a skill. If the 2d6 roll is 6 or better, the player may roll once on any of the skill tables under the appropriate service heading to obtain a skill. Note that characters must still have the requisite education to be entitled to a roll on the second Advanced Education table. I have found that it benefits players to stick to one table (the Service Skills table, for example) while making their skill rolls for one four-year term. Rolling in this manner increases a player's chance of duplicating skills and ending up with higher skill levels. This is optional, but most players will probably want to play a character with fewer skills at higher skill levels rather than play a character with a lot of level-1 skills. Automatic or cascade skills are received normally as outlined in *Citizens*.

Reenlistment and Mustering Out

Reenlistment and mustering out take place normally in accordance with *Citizens* guidelines. In my campaign, however, I require characters to serve four or more terms before they become eligible for a ship as a mustering out benefit. This prevents a character from serving one or two terms and getting a ship for it by making a lucky roll on the material benefits table (something which has always annoyed me). I have characters who have served less than four years treat "ship" rolls on the mustering out table as a roll entitling the character to a choice of any other benefit on the table. Characters who have served four or more years roll normally on the table.

To clarify the system, a format for keeping track of a character's service career appears in the accompanying chart (see Chart #1).

Using this format, let's send a character through two terms of the Pirate service in *Citizens*. The numbers in each column of chart #2 represent the dice rolls I made for survival, etc. that year. (The character's UPP is 786556).

As you can see, our pirate advanced to *Traveller* rank 2 (corporal) and gained 7 skills in his first two terms. Survival-wise, the pirate had a close call (a dueling scar, perhaps?) in the fourth year of his first term, and blew his survival roll in the second year of his second term (since the blown roll occurred within the first two terms, I allowed him to survive). The "rank 1½" notation in the first year of the second term is meant to indicate that the character must make another successful promotion roll before advancing to rank 2. Finally, the pirate character would receive the cascade skill of Brawling-1 to bring his total skill pool to 8 (this is the total number of skill levels accumulated, including duplicated skill rolls). A pirate character generated from the basic system would have accumulated a total of 4 skills.

To illustrate further the difference my system makes, I took the rogue I used as an example at the beginning of this article and ran her through the expanded Rogue service in *Citizens*. Here is the result:

Rogue UPP: 77A5CA Age 34
4 terms Cr10,000
Bribery-4, Streetwise-3, Leader-1,
Ship Tactics-1, Computer-1, Medical-1
Low Passsage Foil

The difference is striking. This rogue can certainly boast that her skill pool rivals that of the scout at the beginning of this article (although her skills are quite different).

A final note to referees: To maintain consistency and balance in your campaign, make sure you generate your *Citizens*-type NPCs with the expanded system if you are using it for your PCs. A speedy way to do this is to use the pre-generated characters listed in *Citizens*. Note the number of terms the NPC served and simply run the NPC back through the same service for that number of terms: Ignore survival, promotion and reenlistment rolls, but do roll for skills on a year-by-year basis (for example, 8 rolls for an NPC who served two terms). As before, the skill roll is 6 or better. The NPC's expanded skill pool takes the place of the previously listed one.

I have used the expanded system for generating characters from *Citizens* in my campaign for some time now, and it is very popular with my gaming group. More than half of them chose to generate characters through the system, and while the crew is a bit motley (a noble, a scientist, a pirate, and two rogues), they certainly spice up the campaign. Best of all, though, they enjoy equal footing with the mercs and merchants who make up the rest of the party. So dust off your copy of *Citizens of the Imperium* and beef up those PCs! **SG**

Chart #1:

Age	Term	Year	Survival	Position/Promotion	Skill (6+)
19	I	1	auto	none this year	two auto
20	I	2	roll	roll*	roll
21	I	3	roll	roll*	roll
22	I	4	roll	roll*	roll

*roll for promotion only after position is attained

Chart #2:

Pirate from *Citizens of the Imperium*

Age	Term	Year	Survival (6+)	Position/Promotion (9+/8+)	Skill (6+)
19	I	1	auto	none this year	two auto (Gambling, Blade Cbt)
20	I	2	8	11 (position: rank 1)	3 (no skill awarded)
21	I	3	7	5 (no promotion)	7 (Streetwise)
22	I	4	6	5 (no promotion)	10 (Streetwise)
				— (reenlistment) —	
23	II	1	9	8 (rank 1½)	6 (Gunnery)
24	II	2	4 (okay)	4 (no promotion)	7 (Blade Cbt)
25	II	3	12	9 (rank 2)	5 (no skill)
26	II	4	9	2 (no promotion)	8 (Blade Cbt)
				— (reenlist or muster out) —	

Where We're Going by Steve Jackson

Time for some more changes around here. This time, it's the magazine schedule that's getting radically adjusted — see "Counter Intelligence" for the gory details. The bottom line is this: SJ Games is redirecting its energies to put less emphasis on magazine production and more emphasis on new games and supplements. We've learned, the hard way, that we can only do so much. Over the past year, magazine production has eaten up a lot of our time, to the detriment of everything else. We're trying to bring things back into balance so we can get some new products out there for you.

Speaking of New Products. . .

(How's that for a subtle transition?) We've got two new releases out, and more coming.

Our two newest releases are ***Toon*** and ***The AADA Vehicle Guide***. I'm really pleased with both of these, for two reasons. The first is that each, in its own way, is a great product — up to our best standards. The second reason is that I was *not* involved in either one until it was mostly done!

That may sound strange, but it's important. Consider: I'm pretty good at what I do. But there's only one of me. If each SJ Games product is my work from start to finish, we won't get much done. On the other hand, if several projects a year are started off by other people, and I wait until the last stages to get personally involved — *then* we can get some real productivity. And if those people are really talented (and they are), and if I provide good direction (and I try to) — then we don't lose any quality, even if we double or triple our output. Renaissance masters called that a "studio." Whatever it is, it seems to be working, and it's another step up for SJG. Cases in point:

Toon was originally designed by Greg Costikyan. It was expanded and developed by Warren Spector, with the help of Allen Varney (and some really good input from Kyle Miller, the *artist* on the project). When they had a finished, playable, hilarious game, *then* I took my turn at working on it. (This may sound like it would take a long time, but the new computer system speeds things up remarkably.) Result: Greg's strange design, Warren's love of cartoons, and my own mania for clarity all worked together. It's not just as good as anything I could have done by myself — it's *better*.

The ***Vehicle Guide*** is a similar story. The original designs were done by Scott Haring and Jim Gould. With the aid of a computer program submitted by Robert Vivrette (and extensively modified in our offices), I checked them all — then Scott and Jim checked *me*. Vehicle descriptions were also double-checked for "realism." Meanwhile, the art was being done. Do you have *any idea* how hard it is to do four different views for each of 129 futuristic vehicles, and make sure that every single view conforms (a) to the written description, (b) to everything else in ***Car Wars***, and (c) to the idea of a workable combat vehicle? We drove two artists crazy before we even got rolling. Kim Strombo didn't go crazy — but I think that was because she was *already* deranged. You have to be, to work here. Anyway, a *lot* of people co-operated on that project. But it doesn't look like a committee effort. It looks *real*.

What Is Reality?

And that's something else about the ***Vehicle Guide*** that I'm very pleased with. It's called "verisimilitude." Insofar as possible, we tried to make everything about the ***Vehicle Guide*** fit the idea of a *real* 2034 publication. Glance at the cover, and you won't know it's part of a game. Pick it up and leaf through it . . . and, until you get to the rules sections in the back, you'll think you've fallen through a time warp! It was FUN to do.

GURPS Again

I am very happy to announce that the first beneficiary of the lighter magazine schedule is ***GURPS***. The Great Unnamed Role-Playing System is back off hold, and growing daily. We have several playtest campaigns going in Austin; by the time you read this, there may be a few campaigns running elsewhere.

We are currently looking at a *possible* February release for the basic ***GURPS*** set. It will probably be a $19.95 boxed game, to be followed immediately by enough adventures (solo and otherwise) to choke a small horse. Yes, we will be accepting reader submissions for ***GURPS*** adventures — but no, not yet. Wait until the game is published.

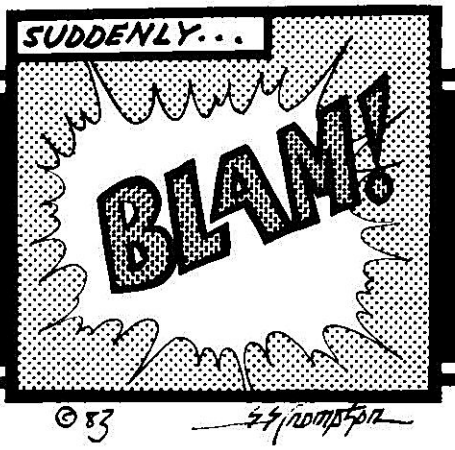
Tune in next issue, and I'll tell you what ***GURPS*** really stands for, and why it's probably the last roleplaying game I'll ever design.

Other New Stuff

When we're not busy gurping, we're working on a few late-1984 releases. These include ***Convoy***, a programmed ***Car Wars*** adventure; two new sets of ***Cardboard Heroes*** (one set of BIG dragons, and one set of ***Champions*** villains); and *The Ogre Book, Volume II*. There are, as always, some other things in the "skunk works" — including a new ***Illuminati*** expansion set that does NOT have any cards in it. We'll see what develops.

—Steve Jackson

Counter Intelligence
by Warren Spector



I Am Not Frink

It seems like just yesterday Chris Frink asked me if I'd like a job as an Assistant Editor at SJ Games, yet here I am taking the helm of what is, in my humble opinion, the best game magazine on the market. Chris has moved on to other projects, leaving his erstwhile assistant in charge. Heh, heh, heh . . .

At some point, I suppose I'll have to tell you a little something about myself, my qualifications, and how I rose to this exalted position in the adventure gaming industry. But that can wait for another time. For the moment, I'll let *Space Gamer* speak for itself. We've got more important things to talk about.

Now You See It; Now You Don't

The departure of an editor is big news (especially when the editor is as big as Chris Frink — the largest human being it's ever been my privilege to know), but it isn't the biggest news, not by a long shot.

The big news is that a noble experiment has come to an end. *Fantasy Gamer*, sister publication to *Space Gamer*, is no more. Issue 6 was the last of the line.

When it was first conceived way back in 1975, *Space Gamer* covered the entire spectrum of adventure gaming. Science fiction games, fantasy games, roleplaying games, boardgames — you name it, *SG* covered it. Then, a year ago, a decision was made to split *Space Gamer* down the middle, and give fantasy gamers their own magazine — *Fantasy Gamer*. Give SF fans *their* own magazine — *Space Gamer*. Everybody would be happy . . .

And that's just the way it turned out . . . almost. Readers were happy. Advertisers were happy. The SJ Games staff was going crazy . . . well, okay, crazier.

You see, we were churning out magazines — *Space Gamer, Fantasy Gamer, Fire & Movement*, and *Autoduel Quarterly* — at the rate of two a month! In addition, we had a commitment to expanding our line of games.

We had to find some way to preserve what little sanity we had left. The best way to do this was to merge *Space Gamer* and *Fantasy Gamer*. Like *Space Gamer*s of yore, the "new" *SG* will cover both SF and fantasy gaming . . . and everything in between. As it has for the past year, *Space Gamer* will appear bimonthly, giving us the time to get some games done, as well.

Space Gamer subscribers will be unaffected by the change. If you subscribed to both *Space Gamer* and *Fantasy Gamer*, the remainder of your *FG* subscription will be added to your *SG* subscription. Those of you who subscribed to *Fantasy Gamer* alone will begin receiving *Space Gamer* with issue 71.

Back in the good old days, *SG* was chock full of reviews. Recently, we've gotten away from that. We're going back. In the months to come, we plan to renew our commitment to bring you authoritative reviews of every major adventure game release. Page through an issue of the "new" *SG* and you'll find more reviews — especially capsule reviews — than you ever thought possible.

And how about a few more blasts from the past? How about contests to stretch the imagination, and Game Master columns to settle those knotty rules questions? Future issues will see the return of these and other *Space Gamer* favorites.

One thing you probably won't find in the pages of *Space Gamer*, at least not on a regular basis, are games and scenarios. Magazine games are incredibly time-consuming, and with our small staff we can't bring you the best games and still keep to anything resembling a regular schedule. That being the case, we'll run games in *SG* only when we've got one that's really spectacular or so intriguing we just can't resist it.

A new addition to the *Space Gamer* family is J.D. Webster's Finieous Fingers. The full-color exploits of this larcenous little devil appeared in *Fantasy Gamer*. Now, Finieous jumps to *SG*.

Reader Survey Results and Prize Winners

In *Space Gamer* 69, we ran a Reader Survey. In order to thank those of you who took the time to respond to our questions, we said we'd draw five response cards and give each winner a $15 gift certificate good on any SJ Games product ordered through our direct mail service. Congratulations to:

D.C. Russell of Virden, Manitoba, Canada; Steven A. Lugo of Pearl City, Hawaii; Frank Modlinski of Loveland, Colorado; Daniel K. Hanegan of Pensacola, Florida; and B.B.I. Hoover of Seneca, South Carolina.

The survey revealed some interesting facts about *SG* readers. In a future Counter Intelligence, I'll tell you about our findings.

Happy 100,000th Birthday to *CAR WARS*

There aren't many adventure games that can boast 100,000 copies in print. SJ Games is proud to announce that ***Car Wars*** has reached that lofty pinnacle. To celebrate, the 100,000th ***Car Wars*** game we produced contains an extra-special message. The lucky purchaser of the 100,000th ***Car Wars*** game will find a coupon in the box entitling the bearer to a lifetime subscription to *Space Gamer* and *Autoduel Quarterly* — and one of *every single game and play-aid Steve Jackson Games currently produces*!

The 100,00th ***Car Wars*** should be on the shelves by mid-October. We'll announce the winner's name as soon as he or she steps forward.

Oh, by the way, if you include all the other ***Car Wars***-related products on the market, we're talking about a lot *more* than 100,000 . . . how does half a million grab you?

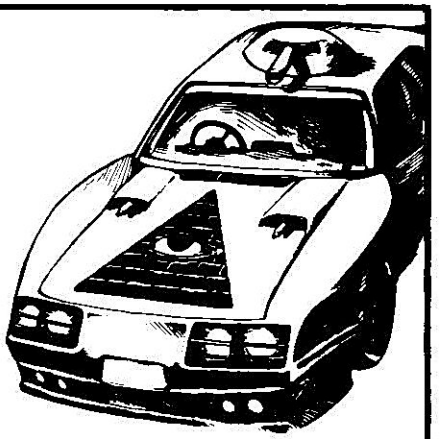
Coming Attractions

In the next issue of *Space Gamer*, you'll find a feature section detailing developments in the world of Tekumel. Among the articles included in this section will be an introduction to the Empire of the Petal Throne, an interview with EPT creator Professor M.A.R. Barker, and reviews of every major piece of EPT material available today! ***Empire of the Petal Throne*** has developed a cult following in the decade since its original release. Recently, there's been a resurgence of interest in Prof. Barker's work. Find out what all the excitement's about in *Space Gamer* 71.

Also: Reviews of Chaosium's new RPG, ***Ringworld***; a survey of ***Call of Cthulhu*** adventures from Theatre of the Mind Enterprises; and a look at the Round Table's PBM game, ***Angrelmar, the Court of Kings***; articles like "Mines in ***Star Fleet Battles***"; "Converting ***Fantasy Trip*** Characters to ***Tunnels & Trolls***"; and much, more more.

KEEPING POSTED

News Briefs



Adventure Systems to Take Over *Car Wars* PBM

Adventure Systems, producer of the ***Illuminati*** play-by-mail game, has acquired the PBM rights to the *Car Wars* game system. Adventure Systems expects to have the new game ready for playtesting this fall.

The PBM rights to the *Car Wars* system were originally granted to Prometheus Games, a small Austin-based firm which recently folded. Prometheus' game, called ***Autoduel***, was an arena combat game with a time scale of one turn equalling one second.

"The original ***Autoduel*** PBM had a time scale . . . which we consider much too slow," Draper Kauffman of Adventure Systems said. "We're currently planning to do the new game in real time plus 60 years, so if today is 1 November 1984, the game date would be 1 November 2044. The new game will also have a much larger scope, with arena combat, open road adventures, convoys, and a full economic system, using the whole North American road network."

"Our first concern was to see that the players weren't left stranded," *Car Wars* designer Steve Jackson said. "The people at Adventure Systems did a truly excellent job with the ***Illuminati*** PBM and we're very pleased that they are picking up the *Car Wars* license. There will be a gap of several months while the new game is being designed, but Adventure Systems has agreed to honor all existing player balances."

Prometheus customers should write to: Adventure Systems, 1669 S. Voss, Suite FF, Houston, TX 77057, for information. Players will be able to apply their Prometheus Games balances toward ***Illuminati*** or wait and apply them to the resurrected ***Autoduel***.

Devil's Advocate Announces Two New Games

Devil's Advocate Games, Inc. announced two new play-by-mail games that will begin play later this year.

Sulfur City is an Old West roleplaying game which, according to the designers, relives the frontier days the way they really were. Expected start-up for ***Sulfur City*** is August 1, And debuting in October will be ***A Shadow of Earth***, a post-holocaust, low-tech roleplaying game.

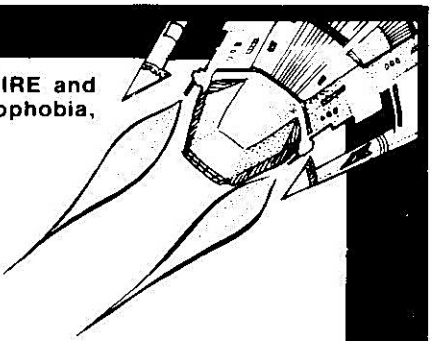
Devil's Advocate currently operates three PBM games, ***Revenge!***, ***Whodunit?*** and ***Room 4***.

Schubel & Son Sells *StarMaster*

Schubel & Son announced that the popular play-by-mail game ***StarMaster*** has been sold to Richard Lloyd, who will continue to run the game in the future.

S&S also announced at the same time the debut of ***StarMaster II***, a "totally revised" game involving completely computerized record-keeping, which the company says should reduce errors in processing turns.

First we brought you over 30,000 turns of BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE and WARBOID WORLD. Now we introduce our new Play By Mail game of Xenophobia, Conquest, and Space Warfare called . . .



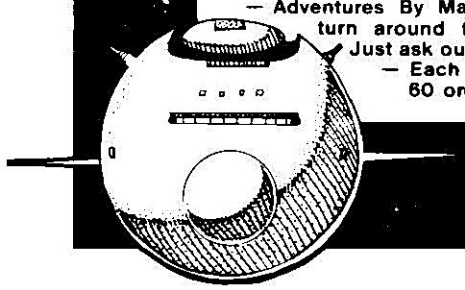
CAPITOL

CAPITOL *Features* —

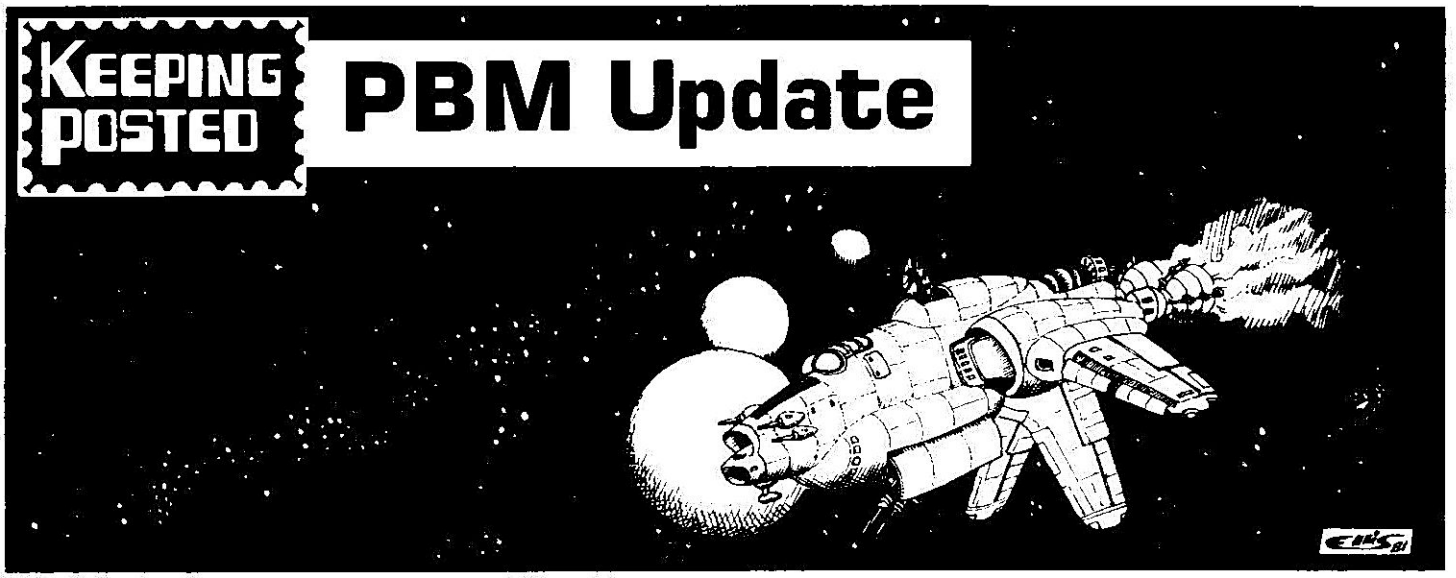
— A strategic space warfare game, completely computer moderated.
— Approximately 100 players per game.
— Players design their race's characteristics and description.
— Design your own starships and build them at your star bases.
— Expand your empire and conquer other races.
— An "advanced stage" of the game introduces new technologies of stargates and improved ship movement capabilities.
— CAPITOL's simplified order formats are easy to remember. No coding your orders onto computer cards or other gimmicks.
— CAPITOL has an easy to understand rule book, complete with numerous examples.
— CAPITOL was subjected to the largest playtest of ANY commercial PBM game. Over 100 players played 1500 turns of CAPITOL prior to its release.
— Adventures By Mail has been providing continuous 48 hour turn around time for all our games since July, 1981. Just ask our players!
— Each turn of Capitol costs $2.50 for the first 60 orders. Each additional 30 orders costs $1.00.

"CAPITOL is fast becoming the standard against which other space warfare games are compared"

— With each rule book you receive a set of overlays to use in mapping the game and moving your ships.
— Mapping CAPITOL is extremely interesting, using the computer printed maps you receive with your turn results.
— No due dates. CAPITOL allows you three turns per month. Most other computer moderated games have the usual one turn every three weeks (approximately).
— Capitol is a balanced game. Each player may buy a maximum of two setups per game.



SEND $2.50 FOR COMPLETE RULES PACKAGE TO:
Adventures By Mail, PO Box 436, Cohoes, NY 12047



—Adventures by Mail—

Warboid World

Congratulations to James Goss, Ronald Larsen, and Lou Wojuk, who are winners of the first three Warboid World games. John Bashaw and William Voorhees also had excellent scores and deserve honorable mentions. All of the winners shut down 2–3 other players.

Capitol

C1: There seems to be no stopping the IVAKA! It appears that a concerted effort by the other major races is needed — but who knows when this will happen.

C2: The FRIENDLIES have catapulted themselves into the lead by not slowing down their exploration/capturing of the frontier worlds. Races are frantically negotiating with each other to prevent themselves from being invaded.

C3: Derelicts have begun to be a regular occurrence, as players struggle for control of their border worlds. The NEW ZYX EMPIRE is back out in front, but the DALEKS are close behind. The MRI CONFEDERACY has begun to look like a tough race to reckon with, and may thrust itself into the lead soon.

Beyond The Stellar Empire

The periphery was shocked on week 5 to see GTT Periphery Director Ralf resign as head of the GTT and be replaced by Governor Flexon of GTT colony Bome. Bome, the largest production colony of the Capellan Periphery, is once again the GTT headquarters. Of note too is that Lord Nasty Bugger, known as a warmonger in some circles, has moved to GTT colony Hypso and is now next in line for the Periphery Directorship.

Werth, an independent colony in Wisepran system and also known as the rathole of the periphery, was named the official neutrality site by the Stellar Empire. This makes it the one colony where the RIP and Imperials could exchange prisoners.

A volcanic eruption devastated AFT colony Ross' Landing on week 3. Mt. Gwad ended its slumber with a massive eruption, sending clouds of ash and smoke high into the atmosphere. Radioactive ash has caused the deaths of some colonists at Ross' Landing, but the eruption was too far away from the other five colonies on the world to affect them.

Two other pieces of news: The RIP are currently blockading Fredrik in hopes of catching unarmed freighters delivering goods to this world under colonization. USS Darkpiper, a colony out in the Transhole Region, was destroyed when the world's ocean shifted due to the failure of the mysterious alien pumping facilities. The colonists were saved, but very little else.

—Jack B. Everitt

—Clemens and Associates—

Company News: The response to our games by players in Australia has made it necessary to add another new quadrant of ***Universe II*** for players outside the US. These special quadrants (IE, IIE, and IIIE) are exclusively for players where the mail delay makes it difficult for them to compete with the one turn per week rate at which our domestic players play. These quadrants are also available to players from Canada, as their mail system is not very fast.

To handle all the new features being added to our games as a result of player research and suggestions, we have added an additional computer system. This will allow the needed expansion to present games, and provide room for a new game later this year.

Universe II

Quadrant I: Auva is now under IXV/LOC control. This alliance now controls over one-third of the civilized star systems in this quadrant. When considered with their allies, the RSS/CA Alliance, over half of the star systems are controlled. The remaining factions, Unity and the UES, each control three stars. There are persistent rumors that the Unity leaders are trying to reach a negotiated truce. It is unclear at this time whether they will be successful in warding off complete destruction of their empire.

Quadrant II: UES fleets have been reported in the area between Zosma and Algieba, and seem to be pushing the IXV starships back toward the Ixtli borders. When the IXV colonies are isolated from their protecting starships, it is likely they will be destroyed. The lower portion of the quadrant has been able to avoid much of the conflict. As a result, several powerful groups have developed.

Quadrant III: The Unity base is still subject to visits by unwanted visitors. Alerts and patrols are frequent due to the proximity of many former OL ships. There is no information concerning the movements of these ships. The CSA continues to build up the bases it has established. Their isolated location makes it difficult for other alliances to monitor their strength. Throughout the quadrant there is increased demand for tungsten. This metal is critical to the construction of many new devices being developed by research facilities.

Quadrant IV: The situation with the current war is still very confused. Accusations have been made by most factions that it was someone else who actually started the hostilities. Several attacks have been made on ships belonging to neutral alliances. It is clear that the next month will see major attacks on the main battle fleets of both sides. While Triad seems to have the strength of its colonies to use as support bases, the more mobile forces of DISS/LOTDP/SUNBANE/*et al.* are able to make quick attacks and withdraw. If either side can gain the support of the several major alliances which have remained neutral, it could tip the scales.

Quadrant XXI: There seems to be no organized defense to the raids being made by several powerful fleets in the corridor between Gysarme and Eyess. Several starships have been completely destroyed and several more just managed to reach Gysarme. Two UES colonies have now been established. This appears to be the first step in the fortification of the area against non-UES interests. The coordinated long-range exploration missions common in other quadrants does not seem to be taking place in this quadrant.

Quadrant IE: Each of the many factions seem intent on building up a strong base of operations before attempting expansion. In the Regajian Empire, colonial efforts continue as their recruitment program is intensified. The ships belonging to the Ixtli Empire are conducting extensive exploration of several star systems. They seem intent on finding the best available sites for defensive bases. The UES commanders are eagerly awaiting the rumored expansion of trading opportunities at Etuel star systems.

Quadrant IIE: The vast majority of the exploration conducted to date in this quadrant is in the Denebold-Zosma-Regulus triangle. Some ships are venturing further out into the quadrant. The few uncivilized star systems discovered to date are being explored in detail. Little has been done toward establishing any territorial claims. A few adventurous souls have discovered the benefits to be derived from abandoning the relative safety of Etuel trading centers.

—Jon Clemens

Schubel & Son

Company News: We are currently in the process of establishing a system to allow players with access to a computer and modem to play a selected number of our computer-moderated games directly from their home computer. This new system will allow players to simply call up our computer system, type in their turns, and receive immediate turn results! The actual system will be operated in a manner similar to that used by the Source, except that you will be charged by the turn and will be limited in the amount of time you can use the system. The games played will be special variants available only to players with the proper equipment and will not be in competition with the normal postal games. Initially we plan to offer these special variants for ***Horizons End!***, ***Computer Boxing***, and ***Arena Combat***. We also hope to add ***Catacombs of Chaos*** and ***Alien Conflict***.

Contrary to a recent gossip column in *Different Worlds* magazine, George Schubel has not died of a heart attack. While he appreciated the condolences, rest assured that he is alive and well. Apparently *Different Worlds* was misinformed about the recent heart attack suffered by George Schubel Sr., Vice President of the Board of Directors, but retired from company affairs. Though he did indeed suffer a heart attack, he has almost completely recovered and is doing very well for a man of 80 years. The well-known George Schubel, President of the corporation, is in fine health.

—Duane Wilcoxson

Advent Games

Takamo

With the First Nomad War's end, the powers which profited from that conflict have begun to crumble.

ELTOPOQUE, a powerful smuggling civilization which successfully conquered many smaller civilizations, has suffered reverses by a cybernetic alliance. The cybernetic races looted a six-planet system and four other ELTOPOQUE planets have been taken.

Massive fleets of unknown origin have attacked TOTILLA, but this independent civilization has been able to recapture some enemy-held planets. Missile ships are making harassment raids on other TOTILLA holdings in an effort to get TOTILLA to spread out its military forces.

The independent civilization builder KVIZIER has reached an agreement with the Brotherhood of the Flag, a pirate syndicate. This loose alliance of pirate civilizations was bloodied by KVIZIER fleets in retaliation for raids on KVIZIER worlds.

The empire GHRISHAKA KHANATE has collapsed after a well-timed revolt. Several rebel governors have declared themselves the new emperor.

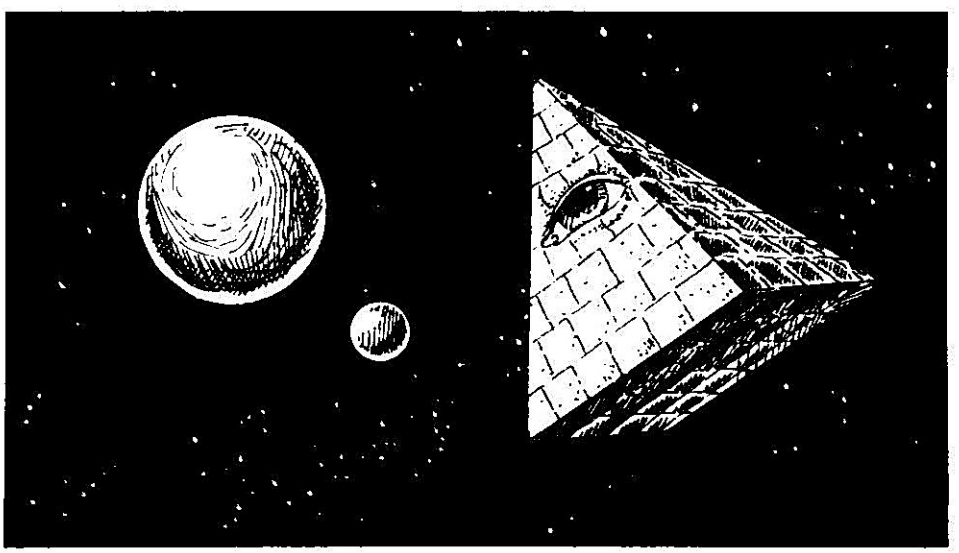
Rumors of a strong young empire forming in the galaxy's upper regions appear to be truthful. Perhaps the new empire can bring order to the galaxy.

Emboldened by the collapse of authority, an ambitious smuggler successfully completed a 50-ship smuggling operation which reaped a handsome profit, causing planetary chaos. Eighteen production centers shut down while food riots rocked the planet.

—Bill Hayes

Adventure Systems

Company News: ***Illuminati PBM*** finished its playtest in May and the game is now in full swing. If enough players express interest, game #11 or #12 will be a "half-speed" game, allowing only two turns a month instead of the normal four.



We are very pleased that we have been granted the PBM rights to Steve Jackson's ***Car Wars*** game system. We expect to have the new game programmed and ready for playtesting by November.

Illuminati

Game 1: Nearly all of the players have chosen to invest heavily in improving the power and quality of their groups, instead of trying to take control of large numbers of weaker groups. One Illuminati reportedly controls four groups, each with 4 control points and Power and Influence greater than 80, posing a great potential threat to any large, loosely defended empire. Several leaders have emerged, only to be attacked immediately. Meanwhile, the tension keeps growing.

Game 2: This has been a very active game, with a lot of hit-and-run attacks. Four players are clearly battling it out for the lead, and one of them has more than half the groups he needs for victory. Meanwhile there are rumors that a former leader is rebuilding his forces around a mystery group with unusual special powers while waiting his chance for revenge.

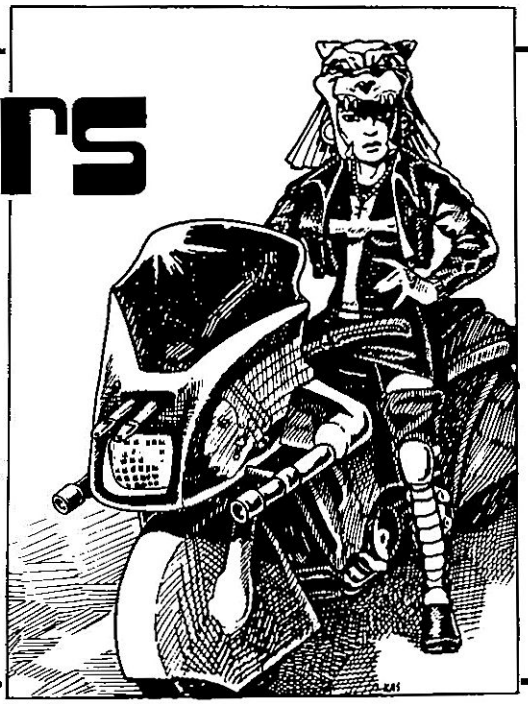
Game 3: Savage battles and intense diplomacy have marked this game. The Merchants of Death were destroyed outright and it is rumored that the two leading players have put together alliances which are planning preemptive strikes against other Illuminati. If either knocks the other out of contention, this game could produce the first winner.

Game 4: This game has been dominated by a titanic feud between several Illuminati. Half a dozen players have lost all or nearly all of the groups they owned, and there is a rumor that the World Terror Alliance — which knocked the Bavarians out of the lead — has been savaged in turn by a coalition of medium-sized groups.

Game 5: Players in this game got off to a very fast start, much faster than in earlier games at the same stage. A single group, the Aerospace Industry, changed hands five times in the first four weeks! Diplomatic activity has also been intense and alliances are forming rapidly. One player jumped out to an early lead and was immediately attacked by three others, but the cost to both sides was reportedly high. If this and other actions are any indication, this is going to be a free-swinging brawl of a game.

Game 6: This has also been a fast starting game, but with much less initial conflict than Game 5. Players have been concentrating heavily on financial groups and countries, and there are signs that three major alliances are beginning to take shape.

Letters



Save My Cat!

Mr. Jackson,

(1) I have two questions about the game ***Illuminati*** and its two expansions.

I know that ***Illuminati*** are above ordinary laws but please tell me, is it really legal for one player to tell another "Do *that* and I'll lynch your cat! Heh, heh, heh . . ."? Don't laugh, it actually happened. The life of Fuzzyface (my cat) depends on your answer.

(2) Are you interested in new ideas for new groups in ***Illuminati***?

Thank you for your time and help. Keep up the good paranoia!

Jeffrey C. Glass
Ronkon Koma, NY

*Well, Jeffrey, I've got some bad news for you and your cat — the **Illuminati** rules do not specifically prohibit animal torture. But before you kiss your Fuzzyface goodbye, you might want to check with your local animal protection society — or find out about the other player's dog. And yes, we are interested in hearing about ideas for new **Illuminati** groups.*

—CF

Star Venture Problems

Issue 68 was exceptionally good, especially the errata to the ***KFCBMOW vs. MAWN*** rules. I'll have to dust off my set and see if I can play a full game without overturning the board (or my stomach).

Seriously, the "Keeping Posted" article on ***Star Venture*** was excellent. The game is playable but has serious conceptual and mechanical flaws that should be taken into account before investing the large number of dollars required to be a contender. I was the first player in the game (Ship #1, destroyer SHADOWGARD) and, probably, the first out. I was succeeding, in that I had the first 45-card turn in the game to run without error (congratulations to GABRIEL on his 99-card turn, that is fantastic planning), had found the ground party wealth ploy, and had sent out ships to try the fuel transfer ploy.

Despite that, I dropped the game like a hot meteor because of the design flaws and GM decisions. S&S would probably say that I dropped because I lost a freighter to a boarding party in the Imperia starport (where all ships are set up); since all ships start there, new ships could be easily stolen before a player sends in his first turn. The rules say that the Imperia forces will not permit piracy in the starting system; somebody had to find out if they were serious. The ground party (GP) that took my ship was not engaged by Imperia forces for two weeks after the boarding. I consider that a flawed response, but that is minor.

Major flaws include the movement, the ability to buy your way in with large numbers of scrapped setups, and the utter lack of control over GP identification.

I hadn't found the 'invulnerability' quirk of using 20 jammers, but it is typical of the sloppy implementation of the game. In conventional theory, each jammer would have a 5% chance of destroying each incoming missile. These are *not* additive! To get through, a missile would have to get a 6 or higher on a percentile die through a number of rolls equal to the number of jammers. Or, consider each jammer as taking out 5% of the missiles that earlier-used jammers missed. It would take an infinite number of jammers to achieve 100% missile destruction. With 20 jammers at a 5% effectiveness rate about 35% of the incoming missiles should still get through. I set up a quick test on my computer to print out the number of rolls on my imaginary percentile dice before I had a 5 or less. In 17 cases out of 66 the number exceeded twenty; the high was 146 straight rolls. Since Jackson would have noticed this in his combats, S&S has improperly implemented their jammer formula and allowed 'invulnerable' ships to enter the fray. Not wise, and a real threat to new players.

One flaw not mentioned is that there is no GM control over ground party identification and there is no way to track a GP back to its parent ship. That was the real reason that I quit the game. Consider some of the possibilities: Suppose that SHADOWGARD is trying to ally with colony ROCK against the CRAYFISH ALLIANCE. A Crayfish ship lands on ROCK's planet, sets up a GP named SHADOWGARD #1, moves away, and lets the GP attack ROCK. Who gets blamed? SHADOWGARD cannot prove that the GP isn't his; he *can* say that it would be dumb for him to attack someone he was trying to win over with a GP which had his name on it. However, if SHADOWGARD thought that ROCK might be inclined to ally with the Crayfish, it would be smart for him to attack with a GP named for his ship; and then claim that it would have been dumb for him to do so, proving that it must have been those back-stabbing Crayfish (and you know you can't trust *them*). So, if ROCK is attacked by the SHADOWGARD #1 and both the SHADOWGARD and the Crayfish Alliance swear that they didn't do it, who does ROCK believe?

The permutations are endless. My good name (potentially) wasn't worth the risk of staying in the game. The ability of a big-money player to buy his way into power with multiple setups for scrapping is another reason to steer clear of this game. I knew of one player who spent $100 for setups to get a flying start in the game.

In fairness, the game is playable. You just have to know that it has very quirky rules and be prepared to accept them.

John C. Muir
Ritzville, WA

More Errata?!

Thanks for the errata for ***Kung Fu CB Mamas on Wheels vs. the Motorcycle Aztec Wrestling Nuns***. (Subscriber bonus, *SG* 68.)

Some of your "corrections" have already ended four arguments over the rules in our three-year campaign. And, the items you did not change meant that the strict reading of the rules was correct. Thus our other, long-standing disagreements are laid to rest, particularly: 1) Victory conditions for burning down the monastery while the nuns are still inside visiting; 2) encounter tables for asbestos Mummy Superiors; 3) trap charts for potholes that move; 4) passing the hot plate at 80 mph through the visiting motorcyle gang during service; and 5) Stevedore Jackson, the hitchhiker, has at least $23 to contribute towards gas if you pick him up.

Allen Barwick
Greenbelt, MD

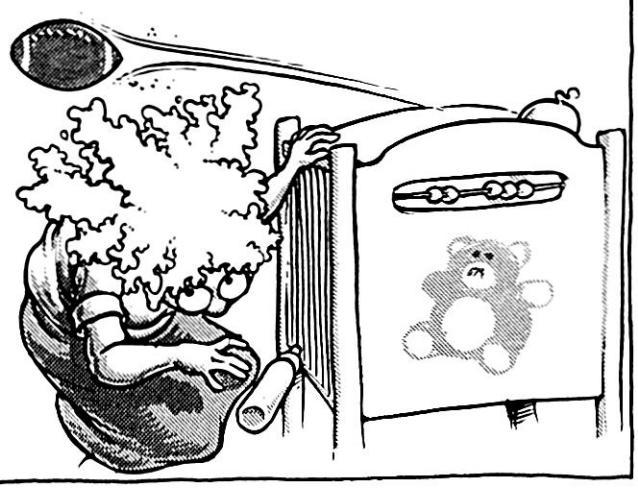
*The popularity of **KFCBMOW vs. MAWN** never ceases to amaze me; to go from such obscurity to these heights in such a short time — who woulda thunk it? I'm glad the errata helped those of our subscribers who play the game. And, judging from the response, there are quite a few players out there. By the way, there was a mistake that a faithful reader sent in just after issue 68 went to press: It is not against the rules to play the game on Tuesdays!*

*Hope you enjoyed the **KFCBMOW vs. MAWN** Character Record Sheet, brought to you as a subscriber bonus (SG 69) by your favorite gaming magazine; who else would print one?*

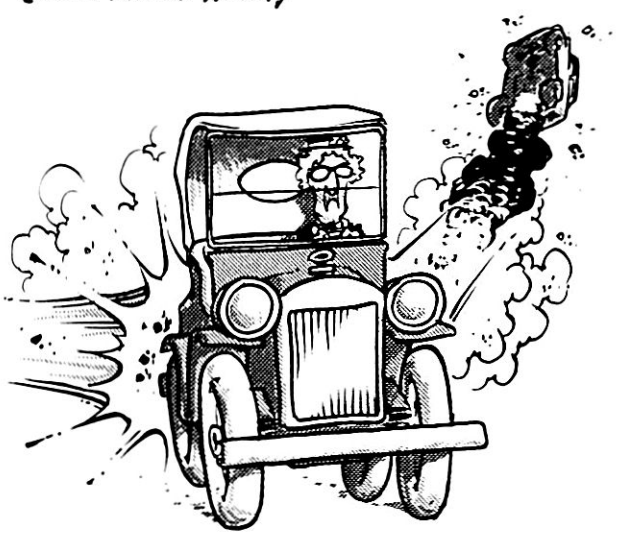
—CF

MURPHY'S RULES

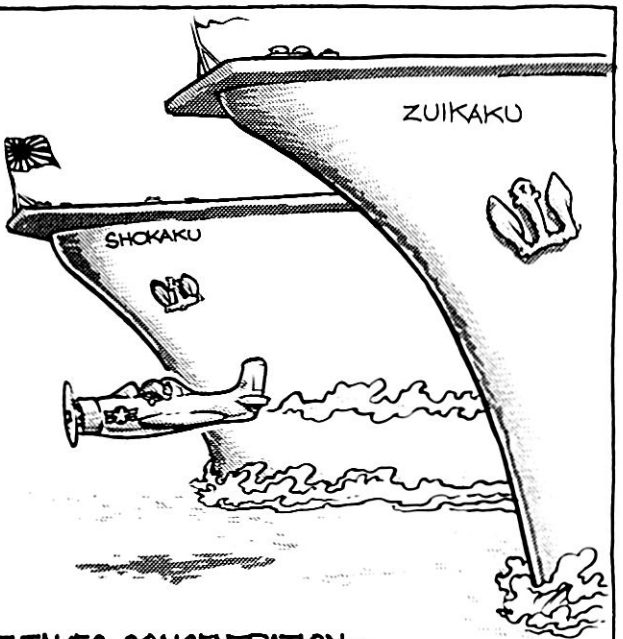
ATTENTION VINCE LOMBARDI···
In Hero Games' CHAMPIONS, an ordinary baby can throw a football 80 meters -- *(Steve Gollmer)*



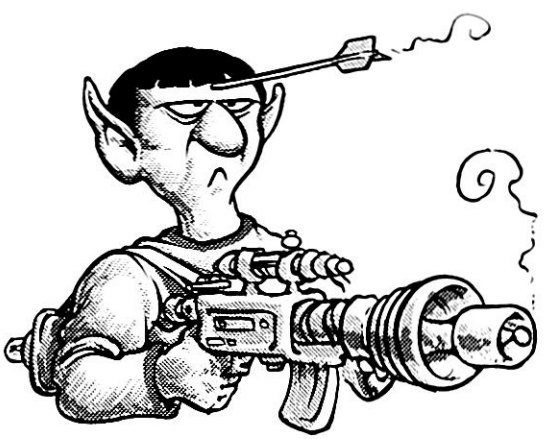
SEAT BELT? WHAT SEAT BELT?
In Avalon Hill's SPEED CIRCUIT, a car which rear-ends another may spin out and crash, but the rammed vehicle is unaffected··· *(Shawn Vincent Wilson)*



BEN SARGENT···

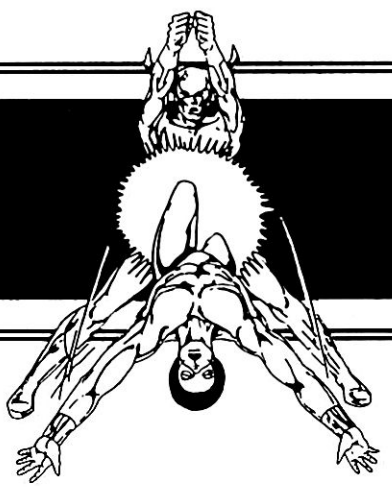


IT TAKES CONCENTRATION···
In GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN (Strategic Simulations), an airplane looking for submarines will ignore enemy carrier fleets it may encounter -- *(Forrest Johnson)*



BUT THEY MAKE A KEEN SOUND···
In STAR TREK: THE ROLE-PLAYING GAME (FASA), phaser rifles can't fire as far as a bow and arrow -- *(Joseph Miranda)*

Capsule Reviews



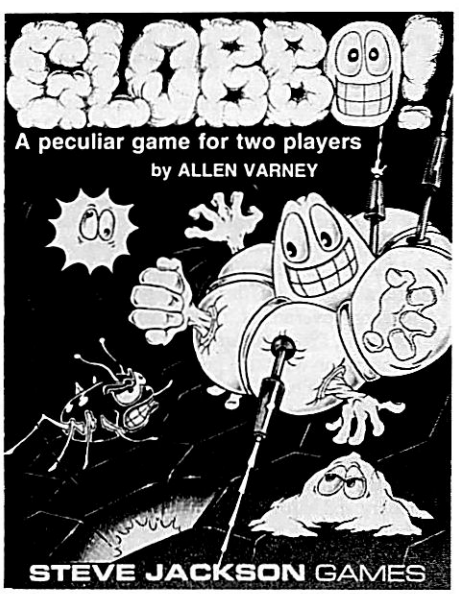
Reduced from SUPERWORLD.

Space Gamer reviews science fiction and fantasy boardgames, roleplaying games, computer games, play-by-mail games, and game supplements. We will review any SF game if the publisher sends us a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical games.

The staff will make reasonable efforts to check reviews for factual accuracy, but opinions expressed by reviewers are not necessarily those of the magazine.

Games and game items for which *Space Gamer* is seeking reviews include ***City of the Sacred Flame, Compleat Adventurer, Compleat Alchemist, Compleat Spell-caster, Crypt of Medea, Death House, Death on the Docks, Dramune Run, Haunts, Invasion U.S., Lair of the Freebooters, Northwest Frontier, Operation Guardian, Plague of Terror, Ravenloft, Ravensgate, Serpent Islands, Shade of the Sinking Plain, Shadowland, Space Race, Streets of Gems, Starship Captain, Sundown on Starmist,*** Superior Models ***Dragon*** releases, ***Tarantis, Thieves' Guild 9: Escape from the Ashwood Mine, Toxins, Village of Peddler's Ferry, Web and Starship, Within the Tyrant's Demesne, Wizards & Lizards*** new releases, and ***Wizards' Realm.***

GAMES



GLOBBO (Steve Jackson Games); $4.95. Designed by Allen Varney. One 16-page 8½" x 11" book with 16" x 21" map and ziplock bag for pieces. For two players; playing time 30 minutes to an hour. Published 1984.

Regular readers of *Space Gamer* will recall that issue 62 was outstanding for two reasons: It announced the great magazine split and it featured Allen Varney's truly strange game ***Globbo***. Now *Globbo* has been released as a separate game, with a larger map and larger and more detailed pieces (as they say in the game business, greatly expanded!).

For those not fortunate enough to have that issue at hand, Globbo is a giant alien babysitter programmed to destroy its charges, the worst brats in the universe. One player plays Globbo, who is composed of a head, a number of Red Slaps, and some Blue Zaps. He's rather like an amoeba, changing his shape with every move. The other player plays the kids, starting off with six Biters who explode into Blips and Yeasts when attacked. The setting is a space-warp nursery room which wraps around in both directions and has five warp holes which connect up to each other. This should be enough to convince you that this is no ordinary game.

I enjoyed this game in its magazine incarnation and it's almost as fun to read as to play (more fun when you're losing). There is some strategy involved, because Globbo regenerates (he can even grow another head, turning him into a them) and Blips and Yeasts can reform into new Biters, using fewer kids than were formed when the original Biter bit it (so to speak).

My only complaints about this game are minor. The updating of the game pieces makes the original magazine pieces look less impressive if I try to interface them with the new pieces. I seem to lose more often than I win (that has to be a design flaw!). And I wish it came in a Pocket Box for easy transport, although I'll admit that the rules look better in this size than they would in the more cramped Pocket Box format.

If you have the magazine version of ***Globbo***, the only things from this version that you're missing are the nifty red printing used for emphasis in the text, a few more Globbo-related illustrations, and two new extras from section IX, "Reflexes" (for the kids) and "Zap Happy" (for Globbo). This may not be enough to convince you to buy the game again, though the larger map and pieces are nice too. If you don't have the magazine game and you enjoy strange games, run (don't walk) to get it.

—Russell Grant Collins

SUPERWORLD (Chaosium); $20. Designed by Steve Perrin. Superhero roleplaying game. Three booklets, three sets of charts and record-keeping aids, one sheet of character silhouettes, and six dice. Playing time and number of players indefinite. Published 1983.

Superworld was originally released as part of the now-discontinued ***Worlds of Wonder*** package. Chaosium has revised and expanded it into a game in its own right, and a good job it is, too. ***Superworld*** is obviously descended from Chaosium's ***Basic Role Playing (BRP)*** system, which in turn was derived from ***RuneQuest***. Each of a hero's seven basic characteristics is determined by rolling 2D6+6; in addition, adding these seven attributes gives a number of "hero points" used to purchase super powers and enhanced characteristics. If these points aren't enough, a character can take on disadvantages such as deafness, various fears, or neuroses. These are worth extra hero points. ***Superworld*** also uses the ***BRP*** "percentage skills" concept: A player who wants to pick a lock, say, rolls percentile dice against his Lockpicking skill. With this system a character can choose a wide variety of skills; characters are even given credit for prior skills, things they knew before becoming heroes. In addition, the ***BRP*** system allows players to create skills.

Combat is fairly straightforward. For most combat skills a player has a percentage chance to hit, similar to the skills metioned above. This is compared on a table to the target's percentage to defend against that type of attack. Cross-indexing the two gives a percentile the attacker must beat to hit.

Chaosium has done a good job with ***Superworld***. Steve Perrin and crew have obviously put time and effort into designing a comprehensive superhero game. The game is presented in a logical, continuous fashion with examples for *everything*. To its credit, Chaosium provides character record sheets, gamemaster record sheets, and other tools to make the players' and GM's lives easier. Even a set of *Cardboard Heroes*-like silhouettes is included to help keep track of characters.

There are a few bugs, however. In melee, for instance, players act in order of dexterity, with players acting in the "action rank" corresponding to their dexterity and every ten ranks thereafter until they reach rank 0. This is usually fine, but some characters could have an unfair advantage. For example, one with a DEX of 31 can get three shots in on someone with a DEX of 10 before the poor guy can do anything about it. Also, I don't know why Chaosium produced the game as a set of three rulebooks, with so many additional sheets. One large rulebook, perhaps with a "GM's Supplement" bound into the center for easy removal, could have saved quite a bit on printing costs — and therefore made the package cost less.

On the whole, however, ***Superworld*** is very good. I doubt that it will ever supplant ***Champions***, but it certainly supplements it . . . especially now that both Hero Games and Chaosium are putting out adventures with stats for both games.

—Creede Lambard

STAR COMMANDER (Historical Concepts); $10.95. Science fiction card game, designed by Bruce Whitfield. 8-page rulebook, five cardboard "Fleet Boards," 156 playing cards. For 2-5 players, playing time 30 minute to one hour. Published 1983.

If given only a quick glance, ***Star Commander*** could easily be dismissed as just another (note the tone of derision) *card game.* But don't believe it, or you'll miss out on a fine little game. The object of ***Star Commander*** is to be the first player to command a complete, fully-manned fleet of starships. Players are dealt a hand of seven cards; ships are built with "crew cards," and range from the 10-crew Scout to the 50-crew Base. The current crew level of each ship is displayed on the owning player's "Fleet Board," a cardboard mat that has a set of graduated crew indicators on it. When you add or subtract crew, simply reposition the ship card on the correct number. Combat between ships

is conducted with weapon and defense cards. If a player plays a weapon card on an opponent's ship, the opponent can respond with the proper defense card. If the opponent holds no defense card, the attacked ship loses the same amount of crew as the strength of the weapon. Combat tends to take on the flavor of "Take that!" "Oh yeah? I evade your missile and fire a Laser 20. Eat photons!" "Big deal, I've got a shield," and so on. There are a number of special cards and rules, but none are particularly complicated.

Perhaps the most appealing element of ***Star Commander*** is the player interaction. It is in this respect that the game most resembles ***Illuminati***. While it's not quite as devious, ***Star Commander*** still puts a premium on negotiation and knowing when to strike up an alliance and when to break one. Some of the more sneaky special cards lend themselves to some dandy player-to-player manipulation . . . er, I mean discussion.

The artwork is functional but not particularly spectacular. The Fleet Boards are simple white printing on a starfield, and the cards are simple black-and-white. There are over 150 cards in the game, but they're quite cheap — after only a couple of plays, the backs of some cards started to peel off. I guess that's the price that has to be paid to keep the game priced as low as it is (only $10.95, pretty good for the number of cards and other components provided).

Other than the low quality of the components, there's very little bad to say about ***Star Commander***. It's easy to learn and features plenty of player interaction. I and my friends have played it over and over again, and we still enjoy it.

—Scott Haring

Reduced from RECON.

RECON (RPG Inc.) $10. Designed by Joe F. Martin. 44-page booklet. For 3-9 players, playing time indefinite. Published 1982.

The background of this roleplaying game is the Vietnam War, 1965-1972. The focus is on the activities of the American and Vietnamese LRRPs (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols) that operated in the Communist rear areas during the War. The players assume the identities of patrol members, carrying out an "operation" under the "MD" (Mission Director). Generally, the operations are confined to standard commando-style actions: Hunting for guerrilla strongholds, airborne penetrations deep into enemy territory, fast raids on installations, and lending support to a small country's government are just a few of the missions that can be carried out. A lot of background information is included on the clandestine activities of the Vietnam War and using ***Recon*** characters as postwar mercenaries. The course of play is much like other roleplaying games — turns are divided into five-second Combat Rounds, in which players move and fight. Characters are generated by randomly rolling strength, agility, alertness, and so forth. Appropriate military skills and equipment are chosen and the mission gets under way. Combat is based on proficiency with a particular weapon type (for firearms) and agility (for hand-to-hand fighting). Experience points are awarded by avoiding human contacts, evading the enemy, and using your military skills; thus, the "sneak and peek" quality of most ***Recon*** operations is correctly simulated.

The best points this game has to offer are its completeness and flexibility. Almost all of the armed conflicts since World War II have been guerrilla wars. ***Recon*** is very suitable for any unconventional-warfare situation. ***Recon*** proves that not every roleplaying game need be a swords 'n' sorcery rumpus or a space opera; many aficionados of modern warfare were probably waiting for something like this to come on the market. The game is put together very well; it is obvious that the designer knows a fair bit about modern warfare.

With this in mind, I find that there are very few weak points in the game. A lot of careful thought and planning is required to play the game: Players who like to go in shooting most likely won't come out. The "mapless terrain generation" concept (terrain is made by randomly scattering handfuls of corn, beans, or buttons on the table) is interesting but messy.

Recon is *the* game for the mercenary fan. It is a pleasure to play and a fine addition to the large inventory of roleplaying games. Supplements have already appeared: a Mission Director's screen; ***San Succi***, a package of 20mm floorplans for a modern adventure city; ***Hearts & Minds*** and ***Sayaret/Track Commander***, two booklets dealing with Montagnard warfare and Arab/Israeli commando action, respectively. If you are at all interested in this historical period, ***Recon*** is well worth the money.

—Brian R. Train

STAR FLEET BATTLES COMMANDER'S RULEBOOK, VOLUME II (Task Force Games); $9.95. Designed by Stephen B. Cole. Sequel to ***Star Fleet Battles Commander's Rulebook, Volume I***. 97-page rulebook. Number of players indefinite, playing time two to five hours (or longer, depending on scenario). Published 1984.

Star Fleet Battles Commander's Rulebook, Volume II completes the task begun with the first volume: the reorganization and compilation of the rules for ***Star Fleet Battles*** in an orderly fashion. It comprises that information from Expansions 1-3 that was not presented in ***Volume I***, including the scenarios. Also present are new rules concerning damage repair, docking, fighter arming, and entirely new scout rules. Finally, revised Master Ship charts and Annexes are provided.

Star Fleet Battles players have waited a year for ***Volume II***, and the information contained therein is welcome. Particularly helpful is a note from Mr. Cole at the beginning of the book, noting changes from the old rules; in the wealth of information, one might miss these changes, which could be disastrous in combat. However, the most welcome advantage of ***Volume II*** is that, when combined with ***Volume I***, one has *all* of the information presented in ***Star Fleet Battles*** and its expansions.

Volume II is meant to be integrated with ***Volume I*** in a looseleaf binder, so why is it spinal bound, requiring it to be cut apart for integration? While we are busy replacing pages (ten of the pages from ***Volume I*** are replaced), why not give us corrected versions of the erroneous pages from ***Volume I***, rather than making us buy the copy of *Nexus* that has the errata? And don't think that buying ***Volume II*** will complete the ***Star Fleet Battles*** rulebooks: ***Volume III*** will be rolling around sometime next year.

Aside from the new rules and rules changes, all that ***Star Fleet Battles Commander's Rulebook Volume II*** does is finish up the information already in the expansions. Furthermore, unlike the expansions, this volume contains no counters nor SSD sheets. If you want to keep up with the latest rules, to complete your ***Volume I*** or to replace your worn-out expansions cheaply, then ***Volume II*** is worth its price. But I must warn you that you can have as much fun with less outlay with just the old rules and expansions.

—Craig Sheeley

SUPPLEMENTS

MOST WANTED — VOLUME ONE (FGU); $5. Written by Jack Herman. Supplement to ***Villains & Vigilantes*** (revised edition). One 8½" x 11" 24-page book. Published 1983.

Most Wanted is, like its predecessor ***Opponents Unlimited***, a collection of villains for the ***Villains & Vigilantes*** game. This book has 30 of the world's most dangerous villains, from Bandit to Vindicator. Villains are given in the standard ***V&V*** format, along with their origins, Combat Tactics/M.O., and Personality/Character Traits. There are no villain organizations outlined (although several are mentioned). A list of 20 thugs is also given, plus the special thugs that work for the supervillain Od. There are also a hundred counters in the center.

Unlike ***Opponents Unlimited***, the villains here (despite some peculiar origins) are all "serious." Any of these villains could be worked into a particular "universe" with little or no difficulty. Those familiar with the game who wish examples of how to put together heroes and/or villains with mixed bags of superpowers that don't seem to match should definitely buy this if their own imaginations have run a little dry. The counters (illustrated by Jeff Dee) are simple yet colorful. My personal favorites are Marutukku (Servant of the Elder Gods), who has a wide variety of powers, and Samhain (a clone of a familiar John Carpenter character).

There are very few flaws in the booklet. The stats of Mystico's servant Reginald are referred to but never given, and Tank Gunner seems to be lacking his Charisma. One of the two organizations in the book, the Inhuman League, requires a careful search through the entire book to find its membership, and it is never made clear if Crossfire (aka Sagittarius) is a member of Zodiac.

All in all, this book is a must for any ***V&V*** fan. ***Champions*** and ***Superworld*** referees might find it interesting for source material, but conversion *is* necessary. I consider it the most useful ***V&V*** supplement to date.

—Steve Crow

ASLAN (Game Designers' Workshop); $6. Designed by J.A. Keith, John Harshman, and Marc Miller. Supplement to ***Traveller***. 40-page 8½" x 11" booklet in a loose folder. Published 1984.

Aslan is the first module in a series detailing the major alien races in ***Traveller***. A short treatise on physiology is followed by an overview of Aslan racial history, which in turn leads to an extremely important section on their society and behavior. Sections on government, military organizations and corporations, and basic language pronunciation end the information on Aslan culture. After the culture section is the character generation section, presenting rules for Aslan skills and explaining the 13 different careers available to the Aslan. Also included are Aslan-oriented expansions of the ***Mercenary/High Guard*** character generation systems. Weaponry and hardware unique to the race are present, complete with proper tables for integration into play. Rules for generating Aslan worlds, how to administer those worlds, humans on Aslan worlds, Aslan in human space, and even tables for random generation of Aslan names and words precede the five-page adventure at the end of the book. The folder-like cover has a sector map of the Aslan Hierate and Aslan space on the inside, along with three very nice illustrations a la *Gray's Anatomy*, comparing Aslan and human statures and detailing Aslan skeletal structure.

The module is wonderfully complete. Everything needed to run an adventure in Aslan space or play an Aslan character is here, and the adventure included is educational, exciting, and provides rules

Reduced from ***Aslan***.

usable in other situations: learning another language and exploring previously unsurveyed space.

The book could use a little organization. The charts are stuck in the middle of the book, interrupting the text. The section labelled "Society" should have been called "Psychology" instead; it would help readers find what they need to run an Aslan. The information is a bit thin, with character generation taking up the lion's share of space. And the module lives down to GDW's usual standard of illustration: There are only four illustrations of Aslan, and three of them are on the cover folder. In fact, there are only three illustrations in the whole book itself!

Shortcomings aside, ***Aslan*** is an excellent module. I recommend it without hesitation. It's worth more than six dollars.

—Craig Sheeley

CHAMPIONS III (Hero Games); $9.95. Edited by Steve Peterson. Supplement to ***Champions***. Eighty-page 8½" x 11" softcover book, including eight pages of record sheets. Illustrated. published 1984.

The second rules supplement to ***Champions*** includes a wide selection of revisions and additions to the existing rules, plus several new modules that should appeal to anyone's superhero roleplaying fantasies. Some current powers are clarified or reworked; a round dozen new powers (like Duplication, Healing, and Shape Shift) are accompanied by a slew of new advantages and limitations. New combat rules, a treatise on campaign planning, a random character generator, and — the centerpiece — "Danger Rooms" round out the package.

For the dedicated ***Champions*** player this is all neat stuff. The rules are lucidly written and organized, and let me congratulate the Hero staff on their improved layouts and graphics. Some power modifications strike me as more interesting than others, but there is definitely a lot here for every hero who has worn out the basic rulebook. The "Campaign Planning" section, for *advanced* GMs, includes revised and expanded agency rules; now you can figure out just *how* big VIPER really is!

I especially like The Danger Room rules. (For you non-*X-Men* fans, a Danger Room is a high-tech, cutthroat superhero training arena.) There's too much die-rolling to this section for my taste, but with its thorough instructions on building and placing weapons, robots, traps, etc., this 15-page rulebook-within-a-rulebook allows the unthinkable: *solitaire* ***Champions***! This certainly makes full restitution for the skimpy treatment given the topic in ***Champions II***.

According to editor Steve Peterson, ***Champions III*** was rushed through production to makes its Origins release date — and it shows. Typos abound, lines are omitted, and the contents page lists an intriguing power modifier — "Multiple Special Effects" — which is left out altogether! As with its predecessor, this supplement includes features of limited use; the random character generator, in particular, is a solution in search of a problem. Most of the records sheets included won't be of much use except to a truly obsessive GM who keeps meticulous track of the least little details of his campaign. Some (small) sections of the rules are reprinted from Hero's *Adventurers Club* magazine. And as for the art, by Mike Witherby and Mark Williams — well, there is no longer any constructive purpose in discussing Hero Games' art standards.

I recommend ***Champions III*** unreservedly to all ***Champions*** buffs who haven't been sated by ***I*** and ***II***. It's an excellent supplement, well worth the price to players and GMs eager to expand their superheroic horizons.

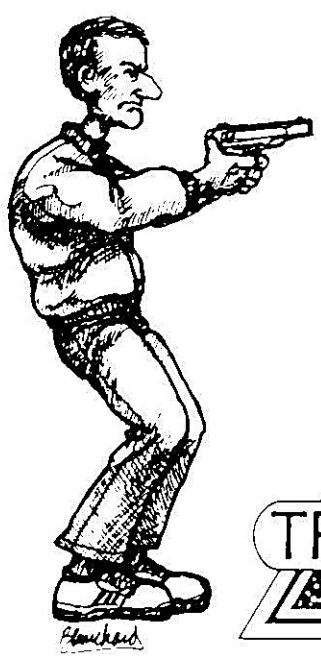
—Allen Varney

(P.S. The contributors of the individual articles in ***Champions III*** were inadvertently left off the contents page. As a public service, *Space Gamer* presents the list of credits, courtesy of Steve Peterson. The introductory essay, "The Evil That Lurks in the Hearts," is by Michael Stackpole; the powers sections were pretty much a group effort by most of the folks listed on the title page, coordinated by George MacDonald; "Mystery Powers and Disadvantages" by Aaron Allston was reprinted from *Adventurers Club* No. 2; "Campaign Planning" is by Peterson; and virtually everything else is by George MacDonald. Congratulations to all.)

(P.P.S. As long as I've blown capsule format with that postscript, this is an opportune time to plug *Hero Games' Newsletter*, a chatty one-sheet affair published irregularly and distributed to Adventurers Club members and at the bacchanalian

Some People Hunt Ghosts
We Exterminate Them...

STALKING
THE NIGHT
FANTASTIC



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Hero convention parties. Some plugs, some gossip, rules variants, and interesting features like the "Champions Challenge" safe combat environment. For a sample copy send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Hero Games, 92A 21st Ave., San Mateo, CA 94403.)

TURBOFIRE (AutoVentures); $7. Designed by Aaron Allston. For use with ***Car Wars, Battlecars***, or ***Highway 2000***. One 32-page 8½" x 11" adventure/rule booklet, 24" x 11" map/chart folder, and eight cardboard playing pieces. For 2-8 players; playing time is 2-4 hours. Published 1984.

Turbofire is a vehicular-combat adventure module of near-future Challenge Cup Can-Am Duel-Racing. It provides all of the background and rules for running the race at Quebec's Millenium Park (just one of the many sites to play host for the most prestigious duel-racing event in the Western Hemisphere). Descriptions of the drivers and their vehicles are given in the terms of three different games: ***Car Wars, Battlecars***, and ***Highway 2000***; conversion advice is given for all three games.

Turbofire does an excellent job of creating the proper atmosphere which you would expect to surround duel-racing. Nagging reporters, big-shot sponsors, saboteurs, and groupies will all have to be dealt with as effectively (some might say "efficiently") as one deals with opponents out on the asphalt. Little details, such as how debris is cleared from the track, regulations on weaponry, divisions involved in the duel-racing circuit, and even a racer's schedule prior to the start of the race, are given to help "flesh out" the setting. However, the best thing about ***Turbofire*** is the rules on actually running the race and setting up the "encounters" (brief confrontations between passing vehicles). Rather than have players lay out the entire track and move their vehicles around the course, ***Turbofire*** utilizes an abstract system of movement which lets players game out only the encounters of the race while covering great distances of time and track.

For all its good points, ***Turbofire*** does have some faults. For one, it presents a situation with limited replay potential. Once the race has been run, there is little left for the players to explore in the next race (unless they're sports enthusiasts). The map, while an interesting design, has no readily-apparent scale to use in locating the vehicle encounters. One small improvement could have been made simply by adding 100-, 500-, or 1000-foot marks along the course. These markers would have greatly facilitated locating encounters. As it stands, the text gives a game scale of 1" = 20 carlengths (300'). Needed but ignored were rules on fuel consumption for the three games; the statement ". . . each car must take a minimum of two pit stops . . . without its two pit stops, it would run out of fuel" is definitely not in keeping with the "flavor" that ***Turbofire*** otherwise projects.

Turbofire is only for those who want more from their ***Car Wars, Battlecars***, or ***Highway 2000*** games than they provide. As a scenario, it is interesting to play . . . once. After that, ***Turbofire***'s true value to the autoduel enthusiast is in what remains: an excellent racing system. Where the players develop the racing vehicles, ***Turbofire*** provides the fuel for running those races, and will continue to do so long after the checkered flag has been dropped at Millenium Park.

—Jerry Epperson

HELL ON WHEELS (AutoVentures); $7. Designed by Aaron Allston. For use with ***Car Wars, Battlecars***, or ***Highway 2000***. 32-page 8½" x 11" booklet, 11" x 17" adventure map/combat chart and 13 vehicle counters. For one player. Playing time one hour or less. Published 1984. Go to (1).

1. If you want to know what the player's task is, go to (4). If you want to see what other information ***Hell On Wheels*** provides (6). If you want a simple solution to the ***Hell On Wheels*** adventure (8). If you would prefer to end this adventure, go to (10).

2. The remainder of the module concerns itself with describing the player's efforts to rescue the fair damsel (notice the word "maiden" was not used); go to (1).

3. These sections are interesting, but really could have been deleted in favor of an expanded adventure section. Most of it is reprinted from ***Turbofire***, the first AutoVentures module; go to (6).

4. In the adventure section, the player accidentally discovers that a man named Warlord is secretly holding a "Princess" captive in his hidden campsite. Since there is a $100,000 reward out for the safe return of the "Princess," the player is obviously interested in rescuing the "Princess." To discover what happens to the player who is not interested, go to (7). Otherwise, go to (2).

5. Perhaps the biggest fault with ***Hell On Wheels*** lies in its layout. The module's protective cover, which has the camp map, vehicle counters, and Quick Combat Position Chart printed on it, requires the chart to be separated from the cover in order to use the counters. It would have been far better to have printed the two switched around. That way, the chart remains with the cover and the counters are usable with whatever game is being used. It should be noted, however, that this is an insignificant quibble. Go to (10).

Reduced from HELL ON WHEELS.

6. ***Hell On Wheels*** is a solitaire auto-combat module using the familiar numbered paragraph system to handle the role of a gamemaster; if you are reading this review correctly, you're following the same system ***Hell On Wheels*** uses. After it has been played several times, it is possible to reuse ***Hell On Wheels*** as a gamemastered adventure (and maps of the Warlord's camp are included for this purpose). If you are interested in other features found in ***Hell On Wheels***, go to appropriate paragraph: Quick-Combat Resolution (9), Background for the world in 2012 and Game Conversion advice sections (3). Otherwise, go to (5).

7. The adventure ends, of course; go to (2).

8. No dice, mac. If ya want an easy way through this adventure, yer just gonna have ta buy ***Hell On Wheels*** and find it fer yerself, go to (1).

9. The Quick Combat Resolution system, while presenting an interesting alternative to the lengthy (and sometimes dull) process of manuevering vehicles into firing position, is not that useful, given the fact that this module is designed for existing auto-combat games. Its addition is confusing (after all, isn't that why you purchase auto-combat modules in the first place?). The system uses a flow-charting method of positioning vehicles; the options allowed are very limited and do not take into consideration such factors as range, speed, or manuevering. And it is next to impossible to handle situations involving more than two cars (though I'm sure Aaron Allston will think of something). If you want to check out the Background and Game Conversion features, go to (3). Otherwise, go to (1).

10. ***Hell On Wheels*** gets a reserved recommendation. The bottom line is, if you like solitaire games and own one or more of the auto-combat boardgames that this module is primarily written for, then it can be a lot of fun. However, I cannot recommend this module to those interested in an abstract auto-combat system, because the one found here is too vague in several important areas to be worth the price tag alone. [END OF REVIEW]

—Jerry Epperson

EAST MIDVILLE (Steve Jackson Games); $3. Designed by Steve Jackson. Supplement to ***Car Wars***. 8" x 14" rules and scenario sheet, two 21" x 32" map sections, and a counter sheet with 41 counters in a ziplock bag. Two to eight players, playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

East Midville is an expansion of the town of Midville, Ohio, from the supplement ***Sunday Drivers***. The map is designed to mate up with the ***Sunday Drivers*** map to produce a gigantic 42" x 64" playing area, but the ***East Midville*** map stands up on its own as well. The map shows a residential area in a moderately affluent midwestern town, including trees, houses, neighborhood businesses, and the short residential thoroughfares. The rules concern the damage potential for the various obstacles to vehicle movement and combat, while the scenarios expand the ***Sunday Drivers*** adventures to a larger scope; two scenarios are provided for players without ***Sunday Drivers***. The counter sheet provides 14 new vehicles (including two patrol cars) and a trailer.

East Midville helps illuminate the large-scale map that was presented in ***Sunday Drivers***, and offers a battlefield for combat even more dangerous than the central district of Midville. The new counters are quite welcome, especially the new tractor-trailer rig; it looks like an ironclad from the Civil War, complete with weapon barbettes.

However, I had been hoping that SJ Games would expand south, to the more exciting battleground of the truck stop; a residential neighborhood isn't as challenging a place to fight in. And the counter sheet could have been more inspired: The cars presented are rather dull-looking, if not just plain boring. I'm still waiting for Denis Loubet to make counters of some contemporary favorites.

East Midville is a real bargain for the price, and the extra counters make it worth buying. And if you can find a 4' x 6' table to put them on, combine the maps from ***East Midville*** and ***Sunday Drivers*** for a mass shootout and running gunfight of epic proportions!

—Craig Sheeley

OPERATION: FASTPASS (TSR); $5.50. Designed by Phillip Taterczynski. Adventure for ***Top Secret***. One 8½" x 11" 32-page booklet with maps, layout and encounter descriptions, and character stats, and a cover with building and country maps. Published 1983.

Operation: Fastpass is the fourth ***Top Secret*** module put out by TSR, and it looks like the best so far. Instead of the commando raids of the previous modules, we have a down-to-earth espionage mission requiring quick thinking and finesse. ***Fastpass*** stresses, and rewards, stealth and wit . . . and quite frankly, plays more like a "real" spy misison. One can imagine James Bond or Jim Phelps drawing an assignment like this.

The agent team is to attend a puzzle convention in Hungary and assist a top Soviet scientist and puzzle expert in defecting to the West. Of course, that's not as easy as it sounds — the agents first have to find the scientist (no small trick, it turns out), make sure he wants to defect, and then spirit him out of the country, all the while eluding the vigilance of

Reduced from ***OPERATION: FASTPASS.***

Russian intelligence and trying to maintain a cover as average, harmless Western tourists.

The best thing about ***Operation: Fastpass*** is its flexibility. The environment (police, civilians, etc.) responds to the agents, not the other way around. There are very few "set" actions for the NPCs to perform, and most of these are modified according to what the agents have done. In addition, this gives agents of all their bureaus (Confiscation, Investigation, and Assassination) something to do. An investigator can concentrate on probing for information rather than worrying about shooting people, while a confiscator can break into hotel rooms to gather clues and the assassin can concentrate on eliminating the opposition. Be warned, though; this adventure requires more charm than firearms prowess. Another nice thing is that the NPCs are more personalized than in past efforts, with more developed personalities and "quirks." This can lead to some interesting encounters between NPCs and agents; in fact, you may want to roleplay encounters rather than use the Contact Table in the ***Top Secret*** rulebook.

Alas, no module is perfect: While the graphics are good, the art is, in a word, lousy. Also, the Perception skill description is at odds with the ***Top Secret*** rulebook on finding traps and detecting forgeries: The book says the Deactivation and Knowledge values, respectively, are used. And there are some minor omissions from the text on NPC movement during the adventure, but this can be solved by a little reading between the lines.

In summary: This is the best, and closest to the genre, of the ***Top Secret*** modules yet. It's comprehensive and flexible, and a great challenge for any would-be superspy. One personal comment: I wouldn't take novice agents into this one; a minimum of second or third level, with several missions under the belt, should be required.

—Kevin Allen

ORIENT EXPRESS (TSR, Inc.); $8. Designed by David Cook. ***Top Secret*** packet. 32-page 8½" x 11" booklet, 31" x 33" full-color mapsheet, 11" x 17" Administrator shield with European train system map, and 24 cardboard figures. For one or more players and an Administrator. Playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Orient Express is an adventure packet, as opposed to a game module, that provides a common setting for several scenarios; in this case, the European railway plays host to six "missions" (with six more ideas suggested but not elaborated upon). Each has a unique goal, car arrangement, and NPCs for the players to deal with. Rules for movement outside the train, new devices and weaponry, and travel protocol are all covered in varying amounts of detail.

Orient Express is very impressive in the graphics department. The "atmosphere" created by the use of photographs, coffee-stained maps, and handwritten notes on the pages must be felt to be believed. The missions themselves range from defector recovery to impromptu terrorist subjugation. Some are easier than others; most are keyed towards three to six PCs of one to three experience levels each. All are interesting to play.

Orient Express does have a few flaws. For the most part these involve missing information (easily remedied by a prepared Administrator), but one is particularly confusing: The system map sometimes gives the same travel time for different cities along the same route. And one route is missing a cost/time notation entirely! Another problem is that the cardboard miniatures included with the game are supposedly meant for use with the mapsheet. They are not very stable and too big to move around; flat counters would have been better.

If an Administrator can get by the small omissions in ***Orient Express***, what remains is a solid and impressive collection of scenarios that will keep players busy for many game sessions to come. If you are going to buy any ***Top Secret*** module, this is the one to grab. It is a cut above anything TSR has produced and is highly recommended.

—Jerry Epperson

DAREDEVIL ADVENTURES, VOL. 2, NO. 2, THE MENACE BENEATH THE SEA (FGU); $5. Designed by J. Andrew Keith, William H. Keith Jr., and Bob Charrette. One 8½" x 11" 24-page book. Published 1983.

It's Oriental thrills galore in FGU's second volume of adventure scenarios for its '30s RPG ***Daredevils***. There are *two* scenarios in this book. The first, Bill Keith's "The Secret of Tahuka Hiva," is set in the South Pacific prior to WWII and features a run-in with the Japanese, leading to the daredevils' imprisonment — and, one hopes, escape — on Tahuka Hiva, an islet where the Japanese have a

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secret base. The second (and title) scenario is "The Menace Beneath the Sea." It is a sequel to Andy Keith's "Deadly Coins" in the previous adventure book, and leads players into another deadly confrontation with the sinister Dr. Ling and his Society of the Blue Dragon (for which read "the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu and his Si Fan"). In this installment the evil master of the Orient continues his search for the Stones of Uighur, legacy of lost Mu. The third item in the book, sandwiched between the two scenarios, is a feature by game designer Bob Charrette on integrating ninja into *Daredevils*, including skills, weapons, special gimmicks, and sample NPCs.

Both adventures are well-conceived and executed, providing maps of Tahuka Hiva, the Japanese base, Ling's monastery and underground complex, and the general geographic areas, plus detailed NPCs, encounter tables, and everything else necessary for a GM to run exciting daredevil actions. Of the two, "Menace" is somewhat the better, if only for its continuing serial overtones and the presence of the menacing Dr. Ling (to whom is cleverly attributed the original design of the superbattleship *Yamato*). "Tahuka Hiva" is a solid adventure too. The ninja feature is especially timely in light of the popularity of such recent film and video offerings as *Revenge of the Ninja* and TV's *The Master*. Extras such as the game stats for the Japanese Claude fighter, Mavis seaplane, and a submarine are nice touches, as are the deck plans of the doomed yacht *Seabreeze*.

I find little to complain about with this adventure book, except perhaps the somewhat nebulous ending of "Menace" in which the GM is told not to let anyone see Dr. Ling die, so he can be brought back later. After all, Fu Manchu "died" several times in front of witnesses, but still managed to return — surprising his enemies a lot more than if there'd been any doubt. Ninja equipment is a bit sparse, too.

Overall, *Daredevil Adventures, Vol. 2, No. 2, The Menace Beneath the Sea* is an excellent set of scenarios and ideas for *Daredevils* play. Even if you never use the adventures themselves, you'll find a wealth of material for use in your own game.

—William A. Barton

DOUBLE ARENA (Steve Jackson Games); $3. Designed by Steve Jackson. Supplement to *Car Wars*. Zip-lock bag containing two double-sided 21" x 32" mapsheets, instruction sheet, and 4" x 7" counter sheet with 74 new full-color counters. Two to 12 players, playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

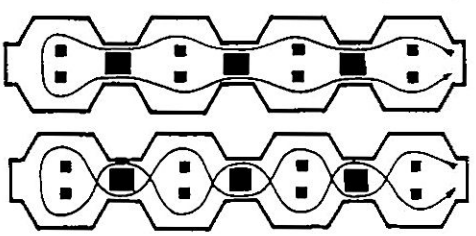
Double Arena features two mammoth arenas, made by combining the two mapsheets on the matching sides. The Dumbarton Slalom Arena map is almost six feet long! The Slalom is a dumbbell-shaped arena where teams race from one end of the arena to the other and back — around T.V. bunkers, concrete pylons, and the inevitable wrecks. High-speed collisions result in more casualties than gunfire in these tag-team events. By way of contrast, the Buffalo Municipal Coliseum presents an unimpeded fighting surface the size of Midville's business district. The huge size allows nearly every kind of contest, even helicopter duels! Unfortunately, the walls are thin, the escape hatches deadly, the T.V. towers randomly hostile . . . An extremely exciting arena to play in.

Double Arena is a good concept: two arenas for the price of one! The counters of four teams driving identical vehicles are surprisingly good; they're the best work I've ever seen by Kim Strombo. The rules are fairly complete, detailing the arenas and their physical attributes (damage points in walls, etc.), and the events that take place in the Dumbarton arena are fiendishly illustrated with a mini-map.

I wish that, for the sake of those who don't have the *Armadillo Autoduel Arena*, the instructions for the Buffalo Municipal Coliseum had included the usual events that take place at the standard autoduelling arena.

Double Arena is a nice switch from the *Armadillo A.A.*, or Midville, or whatever arena you've been using. If your arena fighters need a new place to shed blood, or if you want new (and good) counters, or if you love the idea of a slalom, then *Double Arena* is for you.

—Craig Sheeley



Reduced from DOUBLE ARENA, two ways to run the slalom.

SAFARI SHIP (GDW); $5. Designed by Marc W. Miller. One 5½" x 9" 46-page booklet. For referee and an indeterminate number of players. Playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

This is Adventure #10 for the *Traveller* role-playing system, and deals with a scenario centered around the type K safari ship, a starship configured for excursion and hunting trips. The player characters take the roles of crew members aboard the *Leaping Snowcat*, or hunters and aventurers helping out on the ship's current employment. This job entails the charter of the ship by a rich businessman who is interested in journeying into District 268 in search of a beautiful animal species on a distant world. The patron is desperate to get to the backwater world and discover the creature in order to have it named after him. The entire expedition is a race against time, since the patron must return in time to present his findings to the University of Mora's scientific society. The booklet includes a synopsis of the adventure and details of the course of the expedition. The setting is the planet known only as 567-908, an uninhabited world. Two maps are provided, one for the players and one for the referee. Notes are included on the local terrain and climate and encounter charts are provided. There is also a 14-page section describing the type K safari ship which includes deckplans and the customary room-by-room details.

Marc Miller is up to his usual imaginative standards. While the information on the starship is the centerpiece of the booklet, Miller goes beyond that in his adventure and presents the players with a new sophont race, the "shriekers." The shriekers are a key part of the scenario and the information to handle the characters' contact and interaction with them is provided, along with several pages of shrieker generation tables and diagrams. The usual list of pre-generated characters is dispensed with in favor of a simple listing of the skills that may be useful; I imagine that pre-generated characters are usually ignored anyway, since most players play in a continuing campaign. Miller also provides a short synopsis of the scenario at the outset, making it easier for the referee to understand the rest of the material. One other aspect of the book should be mentioned: the section on hunting, which explains how to conduct hunts and offers some breakdown skills.

The scenario has a couple of weak spots. The patron, Kafla Thingvellir, is sketched out in the barest of terms — a couple of sentences about his business holdings and a listing of his attributes and skills. The referee will have to do a lot of improvising to run him as an interesting NPC. Similarly, the creature the group seeks is given short shrift; a couple of sentences are given and that's it. One might have expected an entry similar to that in the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society*'s "Bestiary" section, including a picture. In fact, the creature is pretty much shoved to the background once the shriekers enter the picture. This may indicate that the *Traveller* animal/event encounter system isn't strong enough to carry a scenario by itself. As interesting as the shriekers are, more attention should have been paid to the ostensible basis of the adventure; without the new race, this adventure would be pretty dull.

The good points of *Safari Ship* far outweigh any of its liabilities. The ship information is excellent, as is the section on hunting, making this a must for any scenario where this sort of ship or a hunter appears. The shriekers are an interesting new race. All in all, another solid effort from GDW.

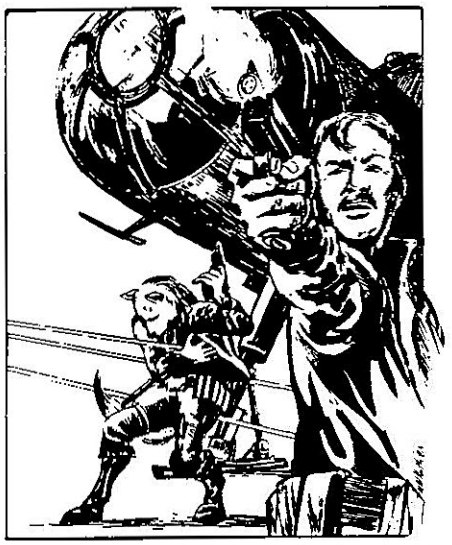
—Tony Watson

THE TRAVELLER ADVENTURE (Game Designers' Workshop); $12. Designed by Frank Chadwick, John Harshman, J.A. Keith, Marc Miller, and Loren Wiseman. 154-page 8½" x 11" softbound book. Two to eight players, playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

The Traveller Adventure follows the crew of a subsidized merchant vessel, the *March Harrier*, through a series of exploits in the Aramis subsector. The adventure begins when the crew meets a Vargr, a member of an alien race, who is having difficulties concerning a brooch. The brooch becomes more important and mysterious as the situation progresses, due to an inordinate amount of trouble caused by persons wanting possession of the brooch. The players are drawn into a web of industrial intrigue and corporate warfare, from which they must extricate themselves.

The entire subsector is well detailed, with several worlds developed even further. The situations are well thought out and play easily; a good GM can get a lot of enjoyment from some of the plots contained within. *The Traveller Adventure* contains a wealth of new information; for instance, a section on the Vargr race includes character generation along with the treatise on the Vargr.

Special mention must be made of the artwork in *The Traveller Adventure*: There is an average of



Reduced from ***THE TRAVELLER ADVENTURE.***

two illustrations every three pages! The artwork is generally excellent, and this count does not include all the maps and charts.

A warning: The title is deceptive. ***The Traveller Adventure*** is a campaign, requiring a total of at least 30 hours of play. Although everything possible is done for the referee, it still requires a considerable amount of time and effort.

I was pleasantly surprised by ***The Traveller Adventure***. At $12, it is reasonably priced. It is, on the whole, one of the best products ever made by GDW.

—Craig Sheeley

THE MIND MASTERS (TSR); $6. Designed by Phil Taterczynski. Supplement to *Gamma World* (revised edition). One 8½ x 10¾" book. Number of players and playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

The Mind Masters is TSR's fourth ***Gamma World*** module, and the second to be adapted entirely for their revised rules. ***The Mind Masters*** sends a group of characters (eight pre-generated ones are provided) to investigate a great store of artifacts. Travelling across the countryside, the players eventually find themselves embroiled in a strange psychodrama within a huge complex, as they are themselves interrogated by a strange disembodied voice, deprived of their weapons and mutational powers, and trapped in a series of dream-like sequences from which there seems to be no escape.

The Mind Masters is probably the most innovative science fiction scenario for *any* roleplaying game to come out in years. If well-played, the characters can become utterly lost in a nightmare world where reality is a highly debatable concept at best. There is very little hack-and-slash and the players will have to almost literally think through each and every step that they take. The artwork by Larry Elmore is also excellent.

Regrettably, an excellent basic concept is spoiled by bad editing and seemingly left-out sections of the rules. Characters armed with fully-charged stun guns are captured by an unarmed mob. Random encounter charts are included, but there are no time references given. While there are few typographical errors, nobody seems to have actually playtested the module. If played literally as written, the module is impossible to complete. A gamemaster will absolutely *have to* fill in the gaps.

While I would recommend this module to any gamemaster looking for new and different ways to challenge his players, I would advise that the gamemaster be *very* experienced, as he or she is going to have to fill in the many gaps in the play sequence. ***The Mind Masters*** is definitely the best of the ***Gamma World*** modules to come out, despite its flaws, but be advised that there are holes that will have to be navigated to get to the good parts.

—Steve Crow

FOR YOUR INFORMATION (Victory Games); $8.95. Designed by Gerard Klug. Supplement to ***James Bond 007***. 72-page rules and information book, a pad of 12 M.I.6 dossier forms, a pad of 12 M.I.6 document forms, and a pad of non-player character cards, boxed. Published 1984.

For Your Information presents additional information for the gamemaster running ***James Bond 007***. Sections on mission preparation, character development, campaign selections, and random adventure generation make up the first part of the book. New rules sections deal with travel, underwater combat, brainwashing, and imposter agents. Useful information about some of the other intelligence agencies and how to play characters from them precedes 12 pages of new NPCs and profiles of 13 new cities. The pack is rounded out by the form pads that come with the book: six sheets of cardstock NPC cards and the dossier/document forms featuring the opulent letterhead of her Majesty's Secret Service.

The information is quite useful to me as a GM; I've been able to do nasty things with the brainwashing rules. The new city profiles are welcome, and finally, players can play a member of another intelligence agency, thanks to the outlines on the major world agencies. The graphics are Victory Games standard, passable; but the red 'Top Secret, classified information' on the documents forms is an amusing surprise.

On the other hand, where are the new rules? The rules presented here are more expansions than truly new situations. ***James Bond 007*** suffers from too few skills, and I had expected to see some here, but there's not one new skill mentioned save Brainwashing. And while the information is useful, there's nothing here that a competent gamemaster couldn't cover on his or her own. The forms and cards are cute, but unnecessary — just fluff to fill up the box. I would have been happier if Victory Games had omitted the pads and brought the price down by a few dollars.

Overall, I was disappointed with ***For Your Information***. If you want *everything* concerning the ***James Bond 007*** game, then you might consider buying this supplement. Otherwise, it's not worth the steep price.

—Craig Sheeley

SECRET OF THE ANCIENTS (Game Designers' Workshop); $5. Designed by Marc W. Miller. 5½" x 8½" 48-page book. Adventure for ***Traveller***. Two to ten players; playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Arthur C. Clarke once said that "sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." That statement sums up ***Traveller*** Adventure #12, ***Secret of the Ancients***, quite well. The adventure sends the players on a search through the Regina subsector for signs of the long-dead race called the Ancients. Dodging Imperial authorities and competitors, they follow up a clue provided in an obscure reference in a diary towards the completion of their goal: to find the secret of the Ancients. And that secret is more startling (in both its simplicity and its scope) than could be imagined!

Secret of the Ancients answers quite a few of the questions concerning the mysterious Ancients, while leaving nearly *any* scenario that a gamemaster may have run about them in perfect accord with the 'official' view; a neat trick of plot-twisting. A well-written scenario that takes the players on a trip through the technologically godlike without allowing them to return with a shipload of other-worldly technology, ***Secret of the Ancients*** is a good sequel to ***Twilight's Peak***.

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Unfortunately, ***Secret of the Ancients*** is not as exciting as ***Twilight's Peak***; it's too concerned with the incredible Ancients themselves, and not mundane mortal affairs. It's a little sparse; a gamemaster will have to put in some encounters somewhere to make the players' job harder and add a little excitement to the game. And, as usual, the art situation is disappointing: only three illustrations. *Good* ones, but so few.

Secret of the Ancients is a good buy if you want either more information on the Ancients or an adventure that plays like a combination of the exploration sequence from the movie *Alien* and the Quest for the Holy Grail.

—Craig Sheeley

AVENGERS ASSEMBLED (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Bruce Nesmith. One 8½" x 11" 32-page book, 4-page cover. Published 1984.

Avengers Assembled is TSR's first expansion module for ***Marvel Super Heroes***. Not an adventure at all, it provides gaming statistics for 30 past and present members of the Avengers superhero team in ***MSH*** terms, along with almost two dozen supervillain foes, a couple of friends, and the agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. The supplement also includes a map and key of the Avengers Mansion and data on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s flying cars, headquarters, and jet fighters. The writeup of each hero or villain includes the name of his super identity, his current status (dead, inactive, etc.), real name if known, origin or classification, ability ranks, variable abilities, powers and talents, equipment/possessions, important people in his life, background and, in a few cases, personality, plus an illustration of the character — all that any gamer familiar with the Marvel universe would need to portray the character in a game or the GM to use as an NPC.

This supplement is surprisingly complete in terms of heroes and villains covered, and should be most welcome to Marvel fans who wish to portray Avengers such as Black Panther, Falcon, Hawkeye, or the Scarlet Witch. Even the Hulk and She-Hulk can be assumed as game personae with the use of this module. The different identities of heroes who've undergone identity changes, such as Henry Pym (Ant-Man, Goliath, etc.) are also included. The map of Avengers Mansion would be of use even to players who wish to create their own "Avengers."

One flaw evident in ***Avengers Assembled*** is that the length of some of the power writeups requires the dropping of the background notes on the character — okay for old-time Marvel fans, but a potential problem for newcomers. This makes possession of the 15 *Marvel Universe* comics a necessity for those without an encyclopedic knowledge of the Marvel universe — something that really should have been avoided. I'd like to have seen more on S.H.I.E.L.D., too, than covered here.

Overall, though, for those interested in superheroic gaming in the worlds of Marvel Comics, ***Avengers Assembled*** is a worthy addition to the original game.

—William A. Barton

THE BREEDER BOMBS (TSR, Inc.), $6. Designed by Jeff Grubb. Adventure for ***Marvel Super Heroes***. Cover folder with character statistics, 16-page scenario booklet, 22" x 17" double-sided map. Two to six players; playing time three to six hours. Published 1984.

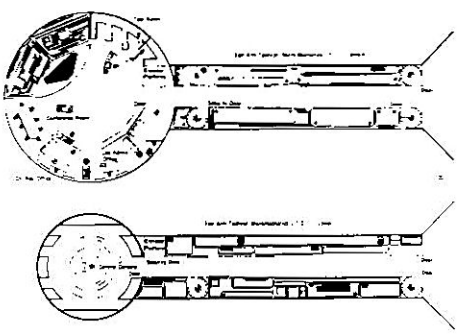
The Breeder Bombs has the players taking the parts of the Uncanny X-Men, attacked within their own headquarters by a surprise visitor who has an even more surprising motive. But the story goes beyond a mere intrusion: One of the X-Men is accused of murder, and clearing him leads the players to the heart of the scenario: the discovery of huge bombs built to release deadly radiation into the atmosphere, to encourage mutations in newborn children. Unfortunately, this would result in massive death counts around the world, so the X-Men must fly all over the world to stop this diabolical plot of their old arch-enemy, Magneto. But be warned: All is not as it seems!

Breeder Bombs should please any *X-Men* fan: It features plenty of slugfests, lots of chances to display the X-Men's prowess, and a lineup of some major Marvel villains, including the justly-feared Sentinel robots. The well-made map shows rural terrain and the Danger Room level of the X-mansion, a welcome addition to the map in the original game.

TSR made one *major* mistake with the adventure: They forgot to include counters for the X-Men and their foes in the game set. The counters are a must for the map movement and add greatly to the game, and the only counter available is the Wolverine counter from the basic game.

Breeder Bombs is a pretty expensive adventue to come without counters, and kind of simple at that; the characters are more led around by their noses than by any merit of their own. Still, if what you want is plenty of combat, ***Breeder Bombs*** is your baby.

—Craig Sheeley



Reduced from ***THE VANISHED.***

THE VANISHED (FASA); $6. Designed by Guy W. McLimore, Jr. and Greg K. Poehlein. One 8½" x 11" 40-page book. For GM and six players; playing time three hours (if timed version used) or more. Published 1983.

The Vanished is FASA's first complete published scenario for its ***Star Trek: The Role Playing Game*** (other than those that came in the basic set). It begins, innocently enough, with the ***Enterprise*** on a routine pass near Federation Deepspace Research Facility 39 during a magnetic storm that has reduced communications to voice-only relays. A routine message is received from the station — but is suddenly cut off in mid-sentence, while the circuit remains open and a carrier wave is still received. Repeated calls bring no further response from the station, so naturally, a boarding party from the ship must beam over to investigate. Once at the station, the *Enterprise* team will find it deserted, and will also find that the storm has cut off all communication with the ship for the next five hours — including the transporter. The players will thus be on their own, with only what resources they have on them and what can be located in the station, as they attempt to discover the fate of the personnel of FDR Facility 39. To say what they might find or to reveal here the cause of the disappearance would give too much away; it is fair to note, though, that players will probably find more than they're bargaining for.

Along with the information on the scenario itself, which would prove a good first scenario for novices at the game (yet could present some challenges to old hands as well), the adventure includes complete deck plans and descriptions of FDR Facility 39, along with character stats and important skills for the entire personnel roster of the station — humans, Vulcans, and other aliens alike.

The deck plans, descriptions, and the personnel roster of the station are perhaps the best aspect of this adventure, making it useful to GMs beyond the play of this one scenario (and even a good buy for those who don't intend to run ***The Vanished*** itself at all). FDR Facility 39 could easily be used as the setting for scenarios of your own devising with the information provided here. The individual illustrations of the station personnel are helpful for use in NPC interaction with player-characters in extended scenarios set at the station. A new alien race, the I'Lglii, introduced for the first time here, is an interesting addition to the *ST* universe and could easily have further applications beyond this scenario as well.

There are a few minor flaws to be found in ***The Vanished***. Two new skills are listed for some of the station scientists — Gravitics and Metallurgy. However, the explanation of Gravitics seems to have been left out entirely, and that of Metallurgy is too brief to be of any use. Also, the two pages taken up for notes on running the scenario as a tournament seem a bit superfluous; published scenarios do not make good tournament adventures, since it's impossible to insure that the players haven't already read them. (Of course, the same can be said for running one as a normal play scenario, too.) The space could have been better used otherwise — further fleshing out the station personnel, for example.

Still, ***The Vanished*** could provide a good evening's entertainment for your *ST* play group — and the Deepspace Facility plans could suggest many more to a clever GM.

—William A. Barton

THE KLINGONS — SOURCEBOOK AND CHARACTER GENERATION SUPPLEMENT (FASA); $15. Designed by John M. Ford, Guy W. McLimore, Jr., Greg K. Poehlein, and David F. Tepool. Supplement to ***Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game***. Boxed set containing one 8½" x 11" 64-page book, a 16-page adventure booklet, a 4-page adventure booklet, and panels for the D7A & M Klingon Battle Cruiser. For two to ten players; playing time indefinite.

This supplement provides a complete character generation system for those Federation opponents, the lovably nasty Klingons, plus background material for same. Background on Klingon society, standard issue Imperial Navy portable equipment and weaponry, Klingon Forces Organization, etc., is all given in great detail. Skills that only Klingons would have (such as Surveillance and Interrogation) are described. Differences between the different Klingon races are also explained.

There is nothing less to describe this supplement than "excellent." The character generation system is almost identical to the Federation system. We were given little information about the Klingons during the three years *Star Trek* was on TV; here we are given a great deal of background Klingon history, based on a just-published novel by one of the coauthors, John M. Ford, titled *The Final Reflection*. The straightforward rules descriptions are broken up from time to time by quotes from *An Informal Guide to the Klingon Empire*, a "soon-to-be-released" UFP publication (slated for printing in about 300 years). Scenario ideas are given as examples. The writers never take themselves *too* seriously and humor abounds, making for an easy-to-read style.

As for flaws, there are . . . none. There are no glaring typos, no inconsistencies between this supplement and its "father." One might gripe that the Klingons never developed tricorders, or that a disruptor has no "Stun" setting (indicative of the

Klingon psychology on such matters), but there is really no reason why the Klingons would have put effort into these developments.

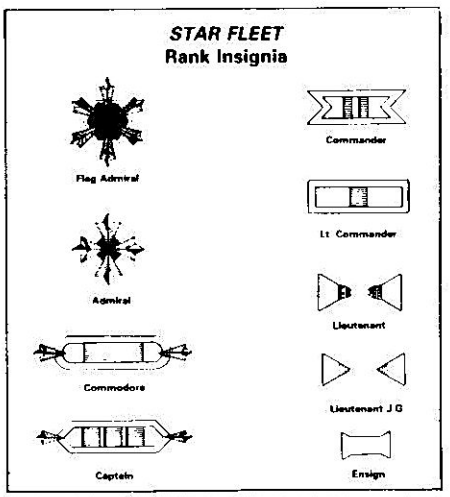
This supplement is the perfect buy for any *Star Trek* fan, whether he or she buys the roleplaying *Star Trek* rules or not. For those people who like playing bloodthirsty, backstabbing characters, or those who want a change of pace from the Prime Directive-bound Federation officer, this is the supplement of choice.

—Steve Crow

STAR TREK III SOURCEBOOK UPDATE (FASA); $6. Designed by Guy W. McLimore, Jr., Greg K. Poehlein, David F. Tepool, and Forest Brown. One 8½" x 11" 48-page book, protective folder. Published 1984.

Right on the heels of its second edition of ***Star Trek: The Role Playing Game***, FASA has released the ***Star Trek III Sourcebook Update***, incorporating into ***ST:RPG*** the changes and additions to the Star Trek universe shown in all three *Star Trek* movies. The book includes technical data on new ships such as the *Reliant*, the *Excelsior* and the Klingon *Bird of Prey* for use in the starship combat systems of the ***Ship Construction Manual*** and ***Starship Combat Simulator***, as well as the Regula I research station and the huge orbital dock of *STIII*. It details the updated equipment and weapons of the movies, along with notes on the new uniforms and insignia. An extended timeline, historical data on the ST universe from the time of the series to the movies, character stats on important personnel, and a short adventure round out the package.

It's difficult to single out any highlights of this book, as the entire supplement is excellently conceived and constructed. The addition of a more powerful Gorn blaster and a Gorn stunner help make Gorn more challenging opponents in armed combat. The historical background explains some points that weren't exactly clear in the movies. A notable inclusion is a revised short character generation form, correcting the errors on the Service Experience Table in the second edition rules.



Reduced from STAR TREK III SOURCEBOOK UPDATE.

I find little to complain about in the *STIII Sourcebook Update*. The greatest omission is that of Decker and Ilia (from the first movie) from the character stats, though more minor characters from *STII* and *III* appear (even those who were unquestionably killed, such as Capt. Terrell).

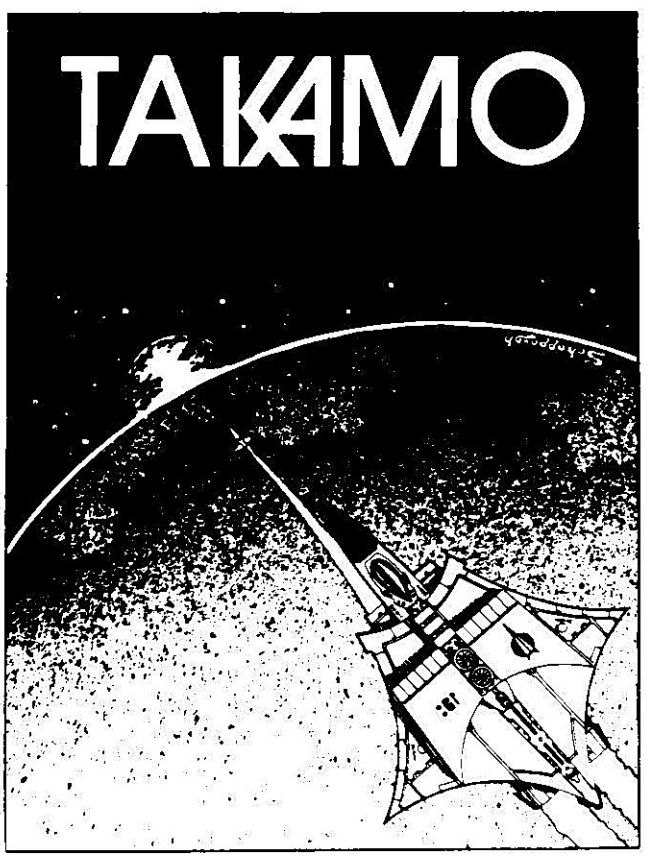
ST:RPG players who enjoy the movies as much as (or more than) the series will find this supplement an excellent addition to the game, and even those who intend to keep their campaigns set in the time of the TV series can find enough useful data here to make this a most worthwhile *Trek* purchase.

—William A. Barton

WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE (FASA); $6. Designed by Guy W. McLimore, Jr. One 8½" x 11" 40-page book. For GM and up to eight players; playing time variable. Published 1983.

Witness for the Defense is FASA's second published adventures for its *Star Trek* RPG. It is a kind of sequel to the series episode "The Devil in the Dark" in that it takes place on the mining planet Janus VI and involves that most memorable of *Star Trek* creature/aliens, the silicon-based Horta. The adventure is designed for play by the crew of the *Enterprise*, though it is possible for other player-characters to be used, since the record of the *Enterprise*'s previous visit to Janus VI would be available to any Star Fleet crew.

The scenario starts with the ship being diverted to the Pergium Production Station on Janus VI so the captain can act as judge in a trial of one of the miners who is thought to have killed another team member. On the way, however, comes word that the situation has become even more serious — the Horta (the last of her race, except for her immature hatchlings) has been found murdered, and during a period when the suspect of the earlier murder was loose. To complicate matters, a Vulcan psionic interpreter of the Federation Diplomatic Corps, on hand to work with the Horta, now intends to recommend to the Federation Council that the mining company's charter be revoked and the planet evacuated, since interaction between the young Hortas and the miners would be too dangerous without the guidance of the mother Horta.



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The crew of the *Enterprise* (or whatever player group is involved) must now unravel the mysteries behind the murders and attempt to find a solution to the situation before such measures can be implemented. To aid in the players' investigations, the adventure includes stats and testimonies for all the important station NPCs and maps of the mining complex and the various tunnels and branches throughout the area. Also included are two sample mining vehicles and descriptions of three new skills, including Mining.

Witness presents an intriguing mystery with several twists for the players to solve, as they check out the various testimonies and clues at the station. The mining facility is nicely detailed and mapped out so that the station could be used again by a GM in any future scenario he might wish to base on Janus VI with the Hortas (or even make up his own now should he not wish to play ***Witness*** as is). The NPCs are quite adequately fleshed out, too, particularly those who have the most significant roles in the adventure.

There are some minor problems evident in ***Witness***. The maps in the book are not arranged in the most logical of sequences, and the complete descriptions of the various areas are split up in two different places in the book, making a lot of page flipping necessary. A "penalty" to the LUC roll necessary when driving a vehicle above its top safe speed is mentioned, but no modifiers for the roll are listed. And an unfortunate typo on the character sheets caused the male Lt. Solon, the Vulcan interpreter, to be listed as a female. However, the biggest potential problem is that the player portraying Kirk (or the ship's captain) must not assist the investigation in any way that would jeopardize his impartiality as the judge at the hearing — a tall order for most players, who'll naturally want to participate as much as possible.

Still, ***Witness For The Defense*** is a well-constructed adventure for ***ST:RPG*** and should provide a satisfying session of play for a crew of Star Fleet players — especially those who particularly enjoyed the Horta episode of the old series.

—William A. Barton

Reduced from ***WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE.***

KLINGON D-7 BATTLECRUISER DECK PLANS (FASA); $12.50. Handbook designed by Guy W. McLimore, Jr., Greg K. Poehlein, and David F. Tepool; deck plans by Ross Babcock, Dan Knutson, Mitch O'Connell, and Jordan Weisman. Six 22" x 34" double-sided deck plan sheets, one 8½" x 11" 12-page handbook. Published 1983.

The *Enterprise* has just blasted the marauding Klingon battlecruiser's disruptor banks to stardust and the enemy ship is floating dead in space; can a crew be beamed aboard to capture her? If this situation has come up in one of your sessions of FASA's ***Star Trek: The Role Playing Game*** and you've found the small-scale deck plans included in the game less than adequate, you might be interested in the boxed set of 15mm-scale ***Klingon D-7 Battlecruiser Deck Plans*** now available from FASA. As with FASA's 15mm set of *Enterprise* plans, the D-7 plans are essentially the same as those included with the game, but approximately doubled in size to allow for the half-inch square grid used in the game's basic combat system. Half-inch counters or 15mm miniatures can be used right on the plans. The 12-page handbook is also almost exactly the same as that found in the adventure book included with the basic game, describing in detail the various areas of the ship and providing technical information along with notes on variations of the standard D-7. Several illustrations of console equipment, etc., are added, and the info on Klingon shuttlecraft is intact here, even though the corresponding data is missing from the *Enterprise* plans.

As with the set included in the game, and the 15mm *Enterprise* plans, these sheets are beautifully executed. If anything, the detail work on the Klingon ship surpasses even that of the *Enterprise*.

However, the same problems can be found on the Klingon plans as on the *Enterprise* set — decks split up among more than one sheet and back-printed plans inhibit action on several decks at once. (Though this is less a problem here, as the D-7 is smaller and has a different configuration.) And the price may seem a bit steep to those who own the original game set that includes the smaller plans (though as with the *Enterprise* 15mm plans, the product is well worth the price).

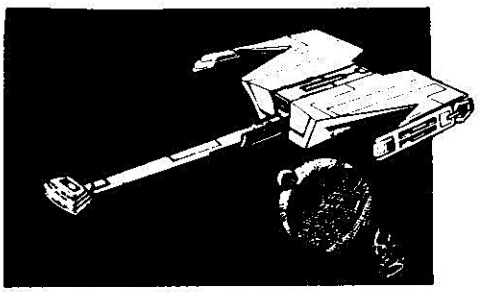
With the recent release of the ***Klingons*** supplement for ***ST:RPG*** and of a basic set minus the deck plans, the 15mm ***Klingon D-7 Battlecruiser Deck Plans*** prove to be a better value for *ST* players and GMs than they are even in their own right. Still, if you can afford them now, they are quite nice.

—William A. Barton

STAR TREK SHIP CONSTRUCTION MANUAL (FASA); $6. Designed by David F. Tepool. One 8½" x 11" 44-page book. Published 1983.

Starships are, obviously, one of the prime ingredients in most SFRPGs. And while many players are content with adventuring in ready-made ships supplied with a particular SFRPG, there are others who prefer to design their own. To meet this need in players of ***Star Trek: The Role Playing Game***, FASA offers a ***Ship Construction Manual*** for use in designing ships of the various major starfaring races in the *ST* universe — the Federation, the Klingons, the Romulans, the Tholians, the Gorn, and the Orions. The main thrust of the book is to provide a guide for designing ships to be used with the game's player-involved, console-panel combat system, and three-quarters of the supplement covers this design problem aspect. The rest gives guidelines on designing deck plans for ships — how many half-inch squares to allot for computers, engines, control panels, staterooms, etc. The main design section provides tables of warp engines, weapons and shields, and gives turn-stress tables, firing tables and damage tables for the various types of ships that can be designed. Components are listed that can be picked out and plugged into ships being designed, depending on the total tonnage of the ship and other factors that vary from component to component. Sample player control panels that can be photocopied and modified to fit the exact ship being designed are included, too, along with instructions on how to construct the panels for a specific ship. To aid in understanding the design process, the *Larson*-class destroyer from the basic game is used as an example, with notes on how it would be built at each step of the design sequence.

The nicest thing about the ***ST Ship Construction Manual*** is that its ship design system is quite simple to use; ships can be built easily and relatively quickly from it. Unlike some games, such as ***Traveller's High Guard***, the *ST* system doesn't require



Reduced from ***STAR TREK SHIP CONSTRUCTION MANUAL.***

several hours of calculating, adjusting and recalculating to build a ship that can be used in combat. Another nice shortcut is that the price of the ship is determined by multiplying its total tonnage *after* construction, rather than having to keep running totals of each individual component price.

The only problems with this supplement are really very few. There are a few unfortunate typos: The Orions are not on the list of bridge sizes while the Klingons are listed twice; and the Romulans were left off the list of computer sizes in the detailed deck-plan design section. It's possible that those who are used to having everything from the general hull configuration to the model number of the computer will feel somewhat lost (or even "cheated") when they fail to find such complexities in this system (although those of us who found all that overly tedious will be glad to see such extraneous details missing).

Overall, however, the ***ST Ship Construction Manual*** is quite well thought out, and more than adequate for building ships from the smallest scouts all the way up to the revamped *Enterprise* of *The Wrath of Khan*. The clean simplicity of its design, emphasizing playability over needless complexity, could be used as a model by future designers of roleplaying starship manuals.

—Willliam A. Barton

DEATH IN SPADES (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Tracy Raye Hickman. Adventure for ***Gangbusters*** 32-page 8½" x 11' booklet, 11" x 17" Judge shield with adventure maps, and eight character identification cards. For two or more players and a Judge. Playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Death in Spades is a multiple murder mystery. The players are investigators trying to solve a series of unexplained murders in the Oberklein Mansion, now a converted dinner club. Prior to play, the GM determines the actual murderer and the victims who will turn up dead, one by one. The players must try to find out who is behind the killings before they, too, become victims.

Death in Spades follows the example of another TSR product, ***Ravenloft***, in that the arrangement of the adventure and the plot twists are determined by drawing cards from a deck, rather than having everything pre-set. This is its strong suit (ahem), because it sustains replay value. The mysteries, and there are several of them, are all well-handled throughout.

All is not ham and jam in ***Death in Spades***, however. There is a great deal of character "channelization" involved. Players used to being allowed to try almost anything will find themselves unnecessarily restricted. There are situations which rely completely upon the players being present at the "scene," yet not interfering; this is akin to dangling a steak in front of a starving dog, only to snatch it away at the last instant. The problem could have been circumvented simply: Scenes which convey information but forbid player interaction could have happened "offstage," so that players hear about them after the fact. This is preferable to telling players that their characters cannot reach the body

because an ambulance arrives immediately and whisks it away.

Death in Spades is an interesting adventure and a great idea. However, it only gets a qualified recommendation; it has a bit too much "divine intervention" to be completely plausible. With a little sweat, the Judge should be able to salvage most of it for use in a campaign. Those not wishing to deal with the prospects of rewriting some of the encounters would be better off leaving this card unturned.

—Jerry Epperson

VANISHING INVESTIGATOR (TSR, Inc.); $6. Designed by Mark Acres. Adventure for *Gangbusters*. 32-page 8½" x 11" booklet and 11" x 17" Judge shield with adventure maps. For two or more players and a Judge. Playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Vanishing Investigator is a fast-paced mystery adventure in which the players are part of a task force involved in the search for a senator who disappeared shortly before his Senate Committee on Organized Crime was to start hearings. During the search the PCs will have to deal with all sorts of strange occurrences in Lakefront City, put the pieces together, and find both the Senator and his family.

Vanishing Investigator is reminiscent of a Dashiell Hammett novel. Players are whisked along through a series of seemingly unrelated scenarios, only to have them all tied together near the end. The scenarios themselves are slanted in the players' favor at the start, then slowly get tougher (undoubtedly to insure that PCs last the entire adventure, at least until the climax). All of these things work in its favor.

But on the whole, *Vanishing Investigator* is *too* much like a novel. The players are channeled in the proper direction regardless of their expertise in handling the various "clues." Nowhere is this more prominent than when the PCs, having failed to put two and two together, accidentally run into a "bum" who turns out to be the Senator! That the Senator is being pursued and the PCs have to deal with this complication does little to lessen the impact of the fact that the players have been helped out by that great divinity . . . the writer.

If you are looking for a well-executed mystery, this one has all of the elements, but is more of a guided tour than a "whodunit." Some will be disappointed by this; I was. That's why *Vanishing Investigator* gets only a qualified recommendation. With a little more work, this could have been really good.

—Jerry Epperson

MUTINY ON THE ELEANOR MORAES (TSR, Inc.) $6. Designed by Ken Rolston. *Star Frontiers* module. 32-page 8½" x 11" booklet and 11" x 25" Referee shield with adventure maps. For two or more players and a referee. Playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Mutiny begins in a rather innocuous way. The characters are engaged in an exploration mission and are surveying a particularly promising planet when they crash-land. It is only while they are sifting through the wreckage of their tiny airship that they discover that the *Eleanor Moraes*, the survey's "mothership," has been taken over by one of the crewmen. This sets the stage for a journey across the wilderness of the planet, Mahg Mar. The characters must recapture the *Moraes* before it lifts off, leaving them stranded on a dangerous world.

If there is one thing *Mutiny* is strong on, it has to be pacing. The adventure gets moving immediately and never slows down. The characters are faced with a very real deadline; the trials and pitfalls which stand between them and the *Moraes* may overwhelm players who approach this adventure with a "scrag 'em and move on" attitude. Some of the encounters are particularly deadly in this respect. The module provides rules for wilderness travel that might be worth the price alone to a GM who uses such things in a campaign.

One can fault *Mutiny* on its plotting. The crewman attempting to "hijack" the *Moraes* must be either insane or very ignorant. Since the man notifies the characters over the radio that he is leaving them, *while the engines are dismantled for overhauling*, one might get the impression that he wants the characters to have a chance at stopping him. I cannot say that this particular opening appeals to me as much as the rest of the adventure does, but it is a case of taking the bad with the good.

Mutiny is aimed at the novice *Star Frontiers* GM who may be looking for an interesting twist for a dying campaign. Others will also find this adventure instructive, but not nearly as much as a beginner will. It is far and away the best *Star Frontiers* module currently available . . . though that's not saying much.

—Jerry Epperson

BELTSTRIKE (Game Designers' Workshop); $12. Designed by J. Andrew Keith. One 12-page system booklet, one 12-page mining handbook, four scenario folders, 11" by 17" map of an asteroid complex, 12 character cards. Three to 12 players, playing time indefinite. Published 1984.

Beltstrike is the second in the series of *Traveller* adventure modules sold in boxed form. It details the asteroid system of Bowman, set in District 268 of the Spinward Marches. The system book covers the history, composition, and physical make-up of the system, including a close look at Koenig's Rock, the haven of resident Belters. The second book details the process of finding, marking, and mining mineral finds on asteroids. Both books place charts at the

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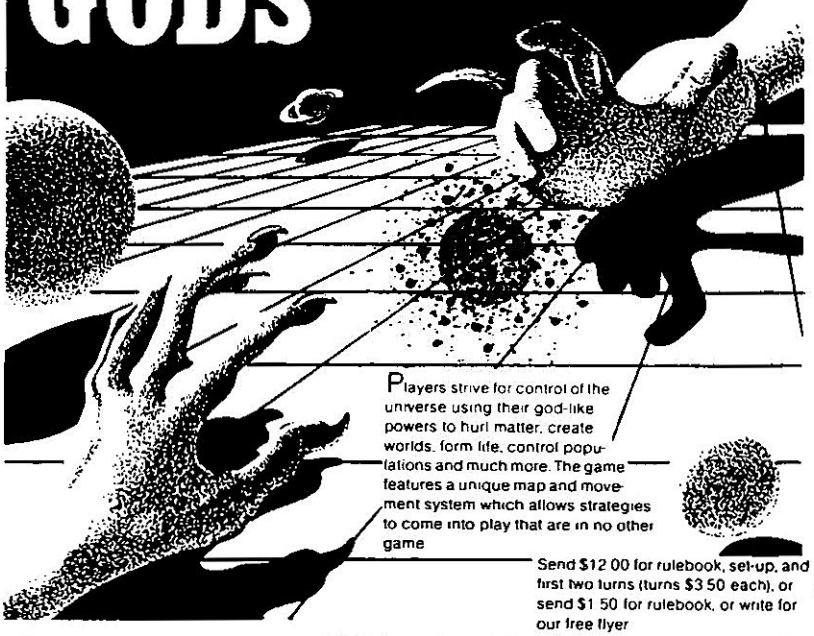

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back, for easy reference . . . and due to the technical nature of the scenarios run in the system, the charts are exhaustive. The map of Koenig's Rock is done in full color and well-organized.

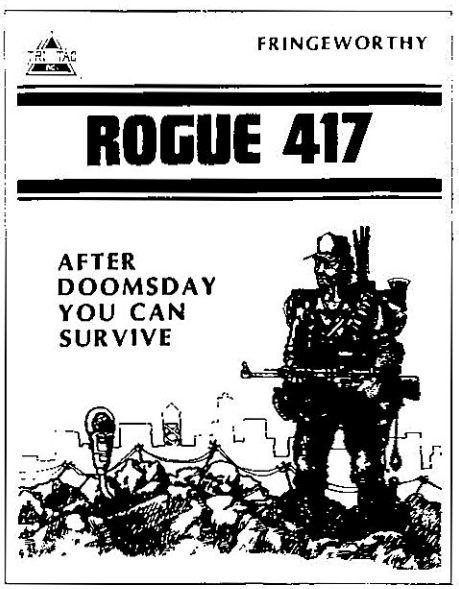
The scenarios lead a group of adventurers through the system, learning how to survive and exploit the properties of an asteroid environment. Unlike the situation in *Tarsus*, there is no central theme linking the modules, just regular adventurism. The four adventures take the players into the system, introduce the environment, take the players on a prospecting voyage, and finally send them on a swift quest for artifacts of the distant past, through a dangerous swarm of asteroids!

Beltstrike provides everything a belt-miner needs: equipment, procedures, techniques. Now asteroid mining is a lucrative way of adventuring in *Traveller*. The module provides an excellent sense of the empty sterility of an asteroid belt and the hard men who make their living there. I was elated to find such good material, even a section for a chase through the close swarm called Yarlsson's Doom; it reminds me very much of the asteroid chase in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Unfortunately, GDW follows its habit of omitting artwork; the module looks great on the outside, with a colorful cover painting, but there is no internal artwork.

Buy ***Beltstrike***. Where *Tarsus* was understandably limited, ***Beltstrike*** has information applicable anywhere men and aliens mine asteroids.

—Craig Sheeley



ROGUE 417 (Tri-Tac); $5.95. Designed by Richard Tucholka. One 8½" x 11" 30-page book. Published 1984.

Rogue 417 is Tri-Tac's first expansion module for its excellent ***Fringeworthy*** interdimensional RPG. It details a post-holocaust alternate earth that has been devastated by the accidental release of a highly virulent plague virus in a lab accident in Syria. (The book doesn't exactly state it, but the virus was obviously for biological warfare use in the Middle East.) The module details the symptoms, effects, and potential cures for the disease (called, of course, Rogue 417), as well as the various conditions of the survivors of its ravages. It also includes a chronology of the alternate earth, from the disease's release to the point where the Fringeworthy arrive to help rebuild civilization. Provisions are included to allow player-characters to portray survivors of the holocaust as well as Fringeworthy characters assisting this world, with the various types of survivors outlined (from anti-techies to hardcore survivalists) to help define new characters. Also included in the module is a large store of information useful in creating post-holocaust settings (from any cause) in roleplaying campaigns.

One of the nicest aspects of ***Rogue 417*** is its universality: Not only can it be used with ***Fringeworthy***, it is also compatible with Tri-Tac's ***Stalking the Night Fantastic*** (with Bureau 13 agents stalking occult horrors reborn into the ruined world), and could even be used with its SFRPG ***FTL 2448***, with Rogue 417 having been loosed on an alien world somewhere. Not only that, its guidelines on constructing and finding survival shelters, generating post-holocaust towns, and creating new mutant diseases could prove useful in other post-holocaust games such as ***Morrow Project*** or even FGU's ***Aftermath*** — making ***Rogue 417*** almost a generic RPG survivalists' guide!

About the only problems that I found with my copy of ***Rogue 417*** were that the printing on a few pages was a little light and there were a few minor typos. I might have liked somewhat fuller descriptions of the survivor types, too, but enough is there to work with.

Overall, ***Rogue 417*** is an excellent first expansion module for ***Fringeworthy*** and should prove useful to gamers of any after-the-holocaust RPG currently on the market. I recommend it highly.

—William A. Barton

OPERATION PEREGRINE (Fantasy Games Unlimited); $6. Designed by Stefan Jones. Adventure module for *Space Opera*. 36-page 8½" x 11" booklet. For three or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1983.

Operation Peregrine involves players in a "whodunit" mystery which contains numerous "subplots." Players are out to solve the mystery of a religious leader who has been kidnapped in the Gatatruit Octant by a band of men who invaded the cult temple. As the players investigate, various clues reveal that there is more to the kidnapping than meets the eye, and soon the players are matching wits with the best of the best . . . an Overbluff! Included with the basic adventure is a complete description of an octant (a quarter of a quadrant) with enough interesting possibilities to keep players occupied for many adventures beyond the current one.

The true enjoyment of this module comes from the descriptions given the gamemaster throughout the booklet. Where else but in the Gatatruit Octant could one encounter the Nattichippin Mercenaries, Poshborough, the Connoisseur of the Horkalie Church, and the infamous Overbluff Dubgie? Some of the cultures described are fascinating, others are downright hilarious. The mystery itself is very well-planned, and enough contingencies are described that the gamemaster will find it very easy to adjust this adventure to the whims of the players.

Operation Peregrine does suffer from being too intertwined with subplots for most players to sort out the dross from the facts. This is not the sort of adventure that can be played in one sitting (unless you're going for a marathon roleplaying record); it will probably take several sessions before the players are close to an answer. Given this, the timeline of the mystery is much too short. The "action" encounters (as opposed to "investigative" ones) are sketchy and seem to be few and far between. While a whodunit is fun to run and play, there probably should be more interaction to keep the warmongers happy. All of these "problems" are pardonable, except that ***Operation Peregrine*** commits *the* cardinal sin by printing a very big clue right on the cover (the subtitle)!

Operation Peregrine is probably one of the better *Space Opera* modules. It provides a lot for the gaming dollar — I have used the octant described in the book as a basis for a series of adventures and have transposed a lot of the alien races into other quadrants. The puzzle itself is challenging, and inexperienced players (read: those of the strictly "blast-it-and-move-on" mentality) will find it a difficult one to solve. I would recommend this to anyone gamemastering an SFRPG who is looking for a change of pace.

—Jerry Epperson

STAR SECTOR ATLAS 2 (Fantasy Games Unlimited); $7. Designed by Terry Cheesman and Edward Simbalist. Supplement for *Space Opera*. 8½" x 11" 64-page book. Published 1982.

Star Sector Atlas 2, as the name implies, is a stellar guide to the Antares Starsector (commonly known as the Mercantile League). The book gives a detailed account of Mercantile League history, the "Codes Duello" which dictate the League's judiciary system, League culture, and the star systems which are a part of the League.

There just isn't that much you can say about a collection of stars that share common goals and "governing" bodies. The supplement either succeeds or fails. This being the case, ***Star Sector Atlas 2*** succeeds. It provides an interesting setting from which the StarMaster (SM) can extrapolate scenarios using the star systems provided in the booklet. The evolution of a far-future, neo-Roman government is not only logically explained, it makes for fairly interesting reading.

The biggest flaw in ***Star Sector Atlas 2*** is the problems it creates for the SM. This is the nature of the beast, however, and anyone purchasing this supplement should be aware that it has an abundance of information which just sits there on the page. *Doing* something with it rests squarely on the SM's shoulders. It would have been nice to see even a list of scenario suggestions that could have acted as "prompts" for a stalled SM. Alas, 'twas not to be.

Giving ***Star Sector Atlas 2*** anything more than a qualified recommendation would be grounds for admission to a rubber room. If you really want someone developing about fifty different stars, dumping them in your lap, and saying something like "Here you go," then buy it. It's much better than ***Star Sector Atlas 1***. However, if you don't like to play editor before using a supplement of this nature, let it sit on the shelf.

—Jerry Epperson

COMPUTER GAMES

M.U.L.E. (Ozark Softscape/Electronic Arts); $39.95. Designed by Dan Bunten, Alan Watson, Jim Rushing, and Bill Bunten. One 5¼" floppy disc and 18-page rulebook, for Atari and Commodore 64 computers. One to four players; playing time 30 to 90 minutes. Published 1983.

M.U.L.E. is a game of conflict only in the sense that ***Monopoly*** is. Four players (those not played by humans will be run by the computer) are set down on the planet Irata to create a going colony; a general store provides essential services, but the "planeteers" must stake their claims to land and produce the food, energy, and mineral wealth needed for success. The player with the largest aggregate value of cash, goods, and land at the end of the game is the winner. The key to doing anything is the employment of Multiple Use Labor Elements, the robot M.U.L.E.s that do the drudge work; but beyond that, the players must be adept at exploiting basic economic principles to prosper. Among those included in the game are economies of scale, learning curve benefits, supply and demand, market manipulation, collusion, and cutthroat competitive practices.

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A lot of thought is needed in all phases of the game, especially in the claiming and working of land. Mountains produce the most "Smithore," plains the most energy, and river areas the most food, but if you have two adjacent plots producing the same thing, you get extra production from economies of scale. Having three plots anywhere doing the same thing gets a bonus due to learning curve benefits. While it is helpful to specialize in one commodity rather than attempt to do everything, too much pursuit of selfish interests is harmful to the colony. If the colony does not end the game with a certain minimum aggregate of wealth, *no one* will win.

There are some flaws in the game. The worst of these is that on the last turn, players need not have any food or energy available for the "next" turn; yet the world is not coming to an end. This lack of a need to provide necessities often leads to a flurry of conversions of food and energy plots to Smithore or "crystite" on the last two turns, which is a time-consuming process that the computer planeteers seem unfairly adept at. They can do far more in the time alloted than is physically possible for a human player, and it makes me wonder if most of the playtesting of this game was done with four human designers who neglected to properly play-balance the computer-run portions. Yet it is not impossible for a nine-year old to beat his father and a pair of computer-run Mechtrons, thereby achieving the exalted status of "First Founder."

M.U.L.E. is simply a great game, a *tour de force* in programming and design, good family entertainment, educational and exciting. If you don't have a computer and disk drive, it may be worth the investment just to be able to play this.

—Steven A. List

JUPITER MISSION 1999 (Avalon Hill Microcomputer Games, Inc. $50. Designed by Scott Lamb. For Atari computers. 48K diskette, "instruction" manual, four hint envelopes. Published 1984.

Another loser from Avalon Hill's computer division. This purports to be an adventure game, made up of sub-games, building to a coherent, satisfying conclusion. Instead, it's a succession of boring, slow, half-baked arcade games. You zap meteors in Basic, play a clumsy version of ***Simon*** to repair your ship, wander around in a maze that can be solved with simple persistence. Some fun.

As the story goes you, the player, are some John Doe picked by the government to fly a spaceship to Jupiter. There've been strange signals from somewhere in the Jovian system. (Does this sound familiar?) It's up to you to pilot a ship to Jupiter, find the source of the signals, and determine their significance.

This sounds okay, right? Not hard to imagine a series of dodge 'n' shoot games that could be adapted to this story? Not here. The games are in Basic, slow and irritating to anyone who's seen *anything* better. There are 11 of them, and they're mostly excruciating. (It should be noted the subtitle of this game is "Part One.")

There is one good sequence. As you approach Jupiter you have the option of dispatching a probe to the system. Your probe sends back data on each moon. This is displayed; you get a graphic readout of facts about the moons of Jupiter.

If Jupiter moon trivia is your thing, or if you enjoy clunky Basic games, you should own ***Jupiter Mission 1999.***

—Bill Wallace

SPACE COWBOY (Avalon Hill Microcomputer Games, Inc.); $21. Designed by Scott Lamb. For Atari computers; disk drive and joystick required. 48K diskette, 8-page instruction brochure. Published 1984.

Unbelievable. The worst arcade action you've ever seen sold for real money. After a noxious intro about good ol' Space Cowboy gettin' locked up on some asteroid hoosegow, you get to maneuver your little character, a cowboy-hatted stick figure, along a three-quarter perspective walkway, dodging blasts from "lasers" mounted in the wall. At advanced difficulty levels there are oil slicks and gaps in the walkway, which you cross by pushing the joystick button, igniting your "jet-boots."

The action is idiotic, wooden, boring after only a couple of minutes of play. If you'd never seen ***Zaxxon*** the three-quarter perspective would be interesting, though it doesn't really contribute to play.

The worst thing about *Space Cowboy* is that AH is selling it twice. It is one of the 11 sub-games that make up their four-disk disaster ***Jupiter Mission, 1999***. All they've added here is a stupid cowboy hat on the player figure. For an extra $29 you can get ten more games just as dull.

—Bill Wallace

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FLEXTILES (Hero Games); $3.95. Artwork by Doug Herring. Supplement to ***Champions***. 5" x 8" plastic sheet, instructions sheet, ziplock bag. Published 1983.

Flextiles are the latest development in the game map visual: instant scenery. Made of electrostatic plastic that will lie flat on most surfaces, the various pieces of scenery are used to add detail to the tactical battle map. The objects depicted are in 25mm scale (1 inch = 6 feet), and will help detail battles for ***Champions*** or any other game on that scale. A wide variety of scenery is provided in the six different sets: street scenery, lab equipment, landscape/foliage, a weapons set, and two sets of vehicles.

The plastic is tough and will stick to a number of surfaces. The artwork is in three-quarters view, and is cleverly done. Unfortunately, you must cut the different pieces apart to use them, and care must be exercised. This also makes storage a problem; the plastic sticks best to itself.

My biggest complaint with *Flextiles* is the price. $3.95 is a pretty steep price to pay for a single sheet of plastic! A shame, too, for the sets certainly help games like ***Champions***, which are greatly enhanced by visual effects.

The *Flextile* concept is a good idea, but not at the price *Flextiles* sell for now. Cut the cost by a dollar or a dollar fifty, and they'd be much better.

—Craig Sheeley

TOP SECRET AGENT DOSSIERS (TSR); $5.50. No design credits. Character sheets for ***Top Secret*** games. Contains 16 character sheets, in cover. Published 1983.

There's good and there's not-so-good in these 8¼" x 10¾" sheets. The good: a cleaner look and design, more room for weapons stats (and better organized, too) and most of all, four new traits — Observation and Perception (from the ***Operation: Fastpass*** module), Shock Resistance, and Gambling — and five new Areas of Knowledge: Anthropology, Business/Industry (also from ***Fastpass***), Linguistics, Naval Science, and Philosophy. The cover briefly explains how to use the additions, with further details promised in the forthcoming ***Top Secret*** supplement.

The not-so-good: There's less space for equipment and personal history, some of the "vital statistics" seem useless in game terms (I don't know how rolling up ten numbers for fingerprint or retina pattern characteristics helps the play of the game), and there are one or two minor typos on the sheet. The biggest drawback, though, is the cost — $5.50 for 16 sheets, or about 35¢ a sheet. That seems a little steep for one sheet of paper, no matter how well done.

Overall, the new ***Agent Dossier*** is an improvement over the old one; the main difference is that you can run off a copy of the old sheet for about 10-15¢. If you don't mind the cost, though, it's a good buy . . . and if you've played ***Top Secret*** for long, like me, you *need* a new character sheet.

—Kevin Allen

PUBLICATIONS

GAMING UNIVERSAL (Imagascape Industries, P.O. Box 437, Hawley, PA 18428); $3. Published bimonthly, edited by Bob McLain. 8½" x 11", 40 or more pages, color cover. First issue published Nov/Dec 1983.

Gaming Universal is a professionally-produced magazine devoted to the play-by-mail field. Articles include reviews of PBM games, strategy discussions, interviews with moderators, new game announcements, and other general PBM news. Articles by notable authors, such as Rick Loomis and L. Sprague de Camp, are not uncommon.

This magazine is ambitious and comprehensive. The editor is competent and innovative. I found virtually no spelling or grammatical errors. The "Gamealog" feature is a chart which lists the fees, features, themes, and addresses of most, if not all PBM game companies; also included are capsule commentaries on each game. It is an invaluable reference. It is obvious that *Gaming Universal* has obtained considerable moderator support. Numerous

ads and special game variants (available only to *GU*'s readers) are included in each issue.

Intervals between issues have run longer than the promised two months. However, the recent purchase of a phototypesetter and the addition of new staff should solve the problem.

Gaming Universal is indispensable to anyone seriously interested in PBM. Non-PBM gamers may even be motivated to get involved after seeing just what is available and how interesting PBM can be. If you read "PBM Update" in this magazine, you should subscribe to *GU*. I recommend it highly.

—Michael Gray

THE BOOK OF ADVENTURE GAMES (Arrays, Inc., The Book Division; 11223 South Hindry Avenue; Los Angeles, CA 90045); $19.95. By Kim Schuette. 8½" x 11" trade softcover, 341 pp. ISBN 0-912003-08-1. Published 1984.

For frustrated computer adventurers across the country, relief! Players of ***Zork, Wizardry, Adventure***, and literally dozens of other text scenarios will find in *The Book of Adventure Games* the answers to the toughest puzzles, the most intricate mazes, and all the really fiendish tasks that have stumped them for hours (days? years?) on end. This big volume is nothing less than a solution book for over 75 different programmed text adventures for the Apple computer. Most of the games discussed are available for other systems as well; a checklist in the back tells which are for what machines.

With its comprehensive selection of games and its clear and complete maps of every labyrinth, *The Book of Adventure Games* will draw hungry looks from a wide range of players. Rank beginner and seasoned master alike will learn just how to escape that minotaur labyrinth, or find the Clockwork Canary that has proven so elusive. The maps, especially, will draw stunned gasps from those of us who never appreciated just how much territory these things can squeeze onto a disk or two — the ***Time Zone*** maps occupy *thirty pages*. Best of all, the hints for each individual puzzle are keyed to map numbers, and then tastefully buried in the back of the book — so you won't yield to temptation (and spoil the fun) until you're good and ready. A thoughtful approach, and much appreciated.

The volume's chief drawback is listed in the first paragraph of this review: its price. Unless you play *lots* of adventures and encounter *lots* of frustration — so why do you keep playing? — I doubt you'll get twenty bucks' worth of value out of the *Book of Adventure Games*. This would be a little too much of a muchness for anyone except a computer club or user's group. On the other hand, at the rate per page companies like Infocom charge for their "hints" (five bucks for ten sheets), this book then is worth about $350.

For those who don't have $350 (or even $20), the individual entries here look *so* mindbogglingly useful for solving a given game, perhaps your best bet is to make a few covert photocopies from a library copy. Mind you, I don't advise such immoral activity, and *The Book of Adventure Games* is worth the money to any aficionado of "interactive fiction" — but just out of random curiosity, where's the nearest Xerox machine?

—Allen Varney

THE PALLADIUM BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY WEAPONS (Palladium Books); $4.95. Compiled by Maryann Donald. Generic roleplaying aid. 52-page, 7" x 10" booklet. Playing time and players indeterminate. Published 1984.

Contemporary Weapons is a collection of the world's most famous and favorite firearms from 1930 to the present. The book is organized into Automatic Pistols, Sub-Machine Guns, Rifles, Shotguns, and Machine Guns. Also included is a description of various types of ammunition and their properties. Each weapon is, in most cases, illustrated and described for cartridge type, feeding mechanism, weight, length, muzzle velocity, and effective range. A section on ammunition type damage and penetration is provided as a basis for comparison in other game systems.

Contemporary Weapons is an excellent playing aid for any of the modern-day horror, espionage, or military roleplaying games on the market. It is aimed at those players and GMs who want more realism in their firearm confrontations or a wider variety of weapons to choose from. Each weapon is described in general terms, but most of the "hard" data that comes into play is provided. Guidelines for incorporating "stopping power" (the ability of a single shot to incapacitate a target without necessarily killing) and penetration are included as options; these are features not found in most modern RPGs.

Contemporary Weapons does have a few flaws, but none which detract from the attractiveness of this book. For instance, it would have been nice, especially for non-military RPGs, to list prices for the weapons and ammunition types. Also, no mention is made as to the amount of damage an average man can sustain. If this had been given, it would be possible for the GM to use the damage ranges given in the booklet and adjust these to fit the game system. As it stands now, this is only possible through the comparison of similar weapons from the game system and the booklet.

If you have no interest in modern RPGs, obviously *Contemporary Weapons* will be of little interest to you. However, if you are looking to expand the firearm variety in your game, this aid is right on target.

—Jerry Epperson

MINIATURES

ALIEN MERCENARIES (Grenadier Models); $9.95. Figures designed by John Dennett. 25mm metal figures for ***Traveller***. Released 1984.

Eleven figures of aliens described in ***Traveller*** literature are included in this set. "Vargr with Rifle" is a 29mm high representation of a member of the wolflike major race whose territory lies coreward of the Imperium. Vargr are described in ***Library Data N-Z***. "Droyne with Rifle" measures 43mm from wing-tip to wing-tip. The Droyne, as described in ***Library Data A-M***, is a major race of winged, intelligent creatures scattered around the Imperium and nearby areas. The Droyne is divided into six castes. The figure depicted (looking much like a winged reptile) is likely of the Sport Caste, as it is the most likely to be encountered by non-Droyne. "Aslan with Pistol," while stalking with a futuristic-looking pistol, seems to be nervously twitching his tail. "Aslan with Rifle" is another member of this lionlike major race whose territory lies rimward and spinward of the Imperium. "The Hiver" is a full 36mm from the base to the topmost of the six sensory tentacles. Four of the five limbs are shown, with details of some of the six manipulatory tentacles on each limb. (The fifth limb rests under the Hiver's body.) The Hiver is dressed much like the one shown on the cover of *The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society (JTAS)* #13, with a beaded chain and holding a communication box. According to *JTAS*, the Hivers are sophonts (intelligent beings) from an area trailing the Imperium. "The Ael Yael" stands 44mm tall. Ael Yael, a minor race of flying sophonts, is described in *JTAS* #15. Figure T-42 is "Vargr with Pistol"; T-43 is "Droyne with Pistol." Figure T-44, "Centaur with Laser," depicts one of the six-limbed K'Kree, whose empire lies trailing the Imperium. (Centaurs are described in *JTAS* #10.) "Centaur with Rifle" depicts a warrior. The largest figure, "A Virushi," is a full 42mm tall. The tanklike figure is 60mm from the tail to the end of the horned snout. All eight limbs are detailed, as well as the armor plates growing on the back. The figure has an instrument in its dexterous forearms, while the aft arms appear ready for a fist fight. Virushi are described in *Best of the JTAS* #3 as "gentle one-tonners."

In addition to the eleven mercenaries described above, the *Alien Mercenaries* package includes a four-page scenario booklet by Gary Pilkington which includes specifications for two pistols, two rifles, a back-hooked Imperium helmet, a backpack, and a hand computer. The box contains a padded bottom, padded compartments, and a photo guide to each of the figures.

All the major nonhuman races of Imperium space are represented in this set of figures. The Hiver figure is the first metal rendering of the most alien of the ***Traveller***'s major races. ***Traveller*** fans have had to wait eight years for this first Hiver figure; finally Grenadier has provided it.

The figure numbers are not very clear on the bottom of some figures, but all the figures are easily matched with the photo guide. In the set I bought, the "Droyne with Pistol" has the left hand and gun missing, but this is more a problem of quality control than of basic design.

These figures help bring to life the descriptions in the sources noted. They are a definite must for the casual or serious ***Traveller***.

—Ed Edwards

TRAVELLER FIGURES: ADVENTURERS (Grenadier); $9.95. Sculpting by Andrew Chernak. Miniature figures for roleplaying games; twelve figures plus two accessories in box with foam-niche insert. Four-page 5½" x 8½" scenario-sheet also enclosed. Released 1983.

Grenadier's new line of 25mm metal figures for ***Traveller*** currently includes *Adventurers*, *Alien Animals*, and *Imperial Troopers*. The line is approved by GDW.

After many years of being disappointed by Grenadier's miniature lines, I was surprised to find *Adventurers* of such high quality. The figures are cleanly molded with little flash or mold-lines, and legs and bases are fully formed. The figures range from the usual pistol-toting types to an unarmed noble government official. Dress and features are a bit ordinary, but the selection is otherwise quite good; perhaps future sets of adventurers will have barbarians, folks from exotic planets, and alien adventurers. The poses are natural-looking and well-animated, a definite improvement over past ***Traveller*** miniatures with spread-eagled, ungainly limb-positions.

There are only a few bad points: Some of the heads and limbs are out of proportion, though not extremely so. The "Adventuress" looks a wee bit anorectic.

Oh, the set includes "Free starter scenario games aid and figures accessories." In my set, the accessories were two nicely molded air-tight hatches suitable for spaceships' decks or walls. The scenario was a short ***76 Patrons***-style adventure about trouble at a mining base; no characters or world statistics were included. These "bonuses" are appreciated, but even without them the set would be a good buy.

I recommend Grenadier's ***Traveller*** figures to anyone running an SFRPG who'd like to add miniatures to his campaign. They're a good deal at the price and are well made. I look forward to further releases in the line. Sets of civilians, and complete crews of ships, labs, and the like would be appreciated.

—Stefan Jones

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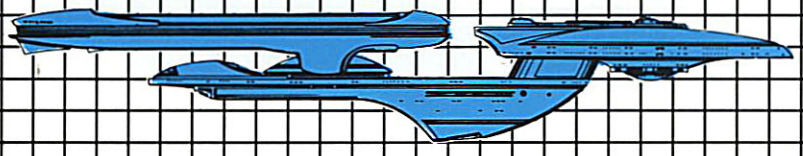

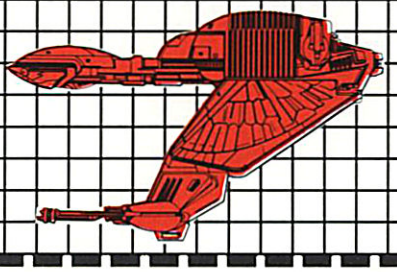

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SCANNER

News from the World of SF Gaming

Victory Leads Origins Awards

Victory Games and Blade/Flying Buffalo took the major awards at Origins '84 on June 23 in Dallas, Texas. Victory took Best Roleplaying Rules for ***James Bond 007***, as well as Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame and Best 20th Century Boardgame. Blade won its awards for Best Roleplaying Adventure and Best Science Fiction Boardgame. Nova Games' *Lost Worlds* won the Best Fantasy Boardgame Award. A complete list of winners:

Winning the H.G. Wells Award for Excellence in Miniatures and Roleplaying: Best Historical Figure Series, *25mm Siege Equipment* (RAFM); Best Fantasy/SF Figure Series, *25mm Call of Cthulhu* (Grenadier Models); Best Vehicular Series, *25mm Dwarf Steam Cannon* (Ral Partha); Best Miniatures Rules, ***Johnny Reb*** (Adventure Games Inc.); Best Roleplaying Rules, ***James Bond 007*** (Victory Games); Best Roleplaying Adventure, ***Stormhaven*** (Blade/Flying Buffalo); Best Professional Miniatures Magazine, *The Courier*; and Best Professional Roleplaying Magazine, *Dragon*.

Winning the Charles Roberts Awards for Excellence in Boardgaming: Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame, ***The Civil War*** (Victory Games); Best 20th Century Boardgame, ***Ambush!*** (Victory Games); Best Science Fiction Boardgame, ***Nuclear Escalation*** (Blade/Flying Buffalo); Best Fantasy Boardgame, ***Lost Worlds*** (Nova Games); Best Professional Boardgaming Magazine, *Fire & Movement*; Best Adventure Game for Home Computer, ***Knights of the Desert*** (SSI); Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine, *Journal of 20th Century Wargaming*; and elected to the Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame, Dave Arneson, co-designer of ***Dungeons & Dragons***.

Only games released in calendar year 1983 were eligible for this year's awards.

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New & Upcoming Releases

Nova, Ral Partha Team Up

Nova Game Designs has teamed up with Ral Partha to produce a boxed introductory ***Lost Worlds*** set that will include miniatures and scenarios. The sets will replace the current two-book sets being produced, Nova president Jim Rosinus said.

The set will include a three-dimensional terrain board, four lead figures (two of each combatant), six accessories such as tables, swords, and other furniture, two ***Lost Worlds*** books, and another booklet with suggested scenarios. Current plans are for one set to feature the "Man in Chainmail" and "Skeleton" books, and the other to use the "Goblin with Mace" and "Dwarf with Axe" books. Suggested retail price is $16.95.

Plans down the line for Nova include ***Tall Ships***, a picture book game of fighting sailing vessels; and ***Wing Leader***, an ***Ace of Aces***-style picture book game of World War II air combat. Planned releases in the ***Wing Leader*** line include a Spitfire vs. a ME-109, a P-51 vs. a FW-190, and (tentatively) a Corsair vs. a Zero.

Hero Games Plans *Espionage* Revision

Hero Games, publisher of ***Champions*** and the new ***Justice, Inc.***, is now working on a total revision of its modern-era spy roleplaying game, ***Espionage***.

"We're ripping it apart and putting it back together again," designer Steve Peterson said. The revised game will even have a new title — ***Danger International***. It will include additional game backgrounds, new art, and some additional rules. Owners of the ***Espionage*** game, Peterson said, will be able to get the new and changed material in ***Danger International*** for a small fee.

Other releases from Hero Games include ***Trail of the Gold Spike***, the first ***Justice, Inc.*** adventure (with accompanying statistics for ***Call of Cthulhu***, ***Daredevils***, and ***Mercenaries, Spies and Private Eyes***) released at Gen Con 17; ***Enemies III***, a supplement for ***Champions*** due out in October; and ***Organizations Book II***, another ***Champions*** supplement, due out in November.

Convention Calendar

Cleveland, OH — NOWSCON '84, Sept. 29-30. Napoleonics, Micro Armor, other miniatures, boardgaming, and auction. Contact Northern Ohio Wargaming Society, Box 29116, Parma, OH 44129.

Minneapolis, MN — U-CON 2, Oct. 5-7. Gaming con held on the campus of the University of Minnesota. Contact U-Con 2, 262 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103.

Schenectady, NY — TENTH ANNUAL COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS, Oct. 5-8. Gaming con. Contact I.M. Lord, SWA 10th Council, 1639 Eastern Parkway, Schenectady, NY 12309.

Mile End, Australia — SAGACON, Oct. 6. Gaming convention way down under, on the campus of Adelaide University. Contact SaGaCon, c/o Homer Zeitz, 2 Cowra St., Mile End S.A. 5031, Australia.

Lincoln, NE — LIN-CON VI, Oct. 12-14. Gaming con. Contact Lin-Con VI, c/o Hobby Town, 134 North 13th St., Lincoln, NE 68508.

Denver, CO — CRUSADER CON IV, Oct. 19-21. Game tournaments, computer room, more, on the campus of Metropolitan State College. Contact The Auraria Gamer's Club, Box 13395, Denver, CO 80201-3395.

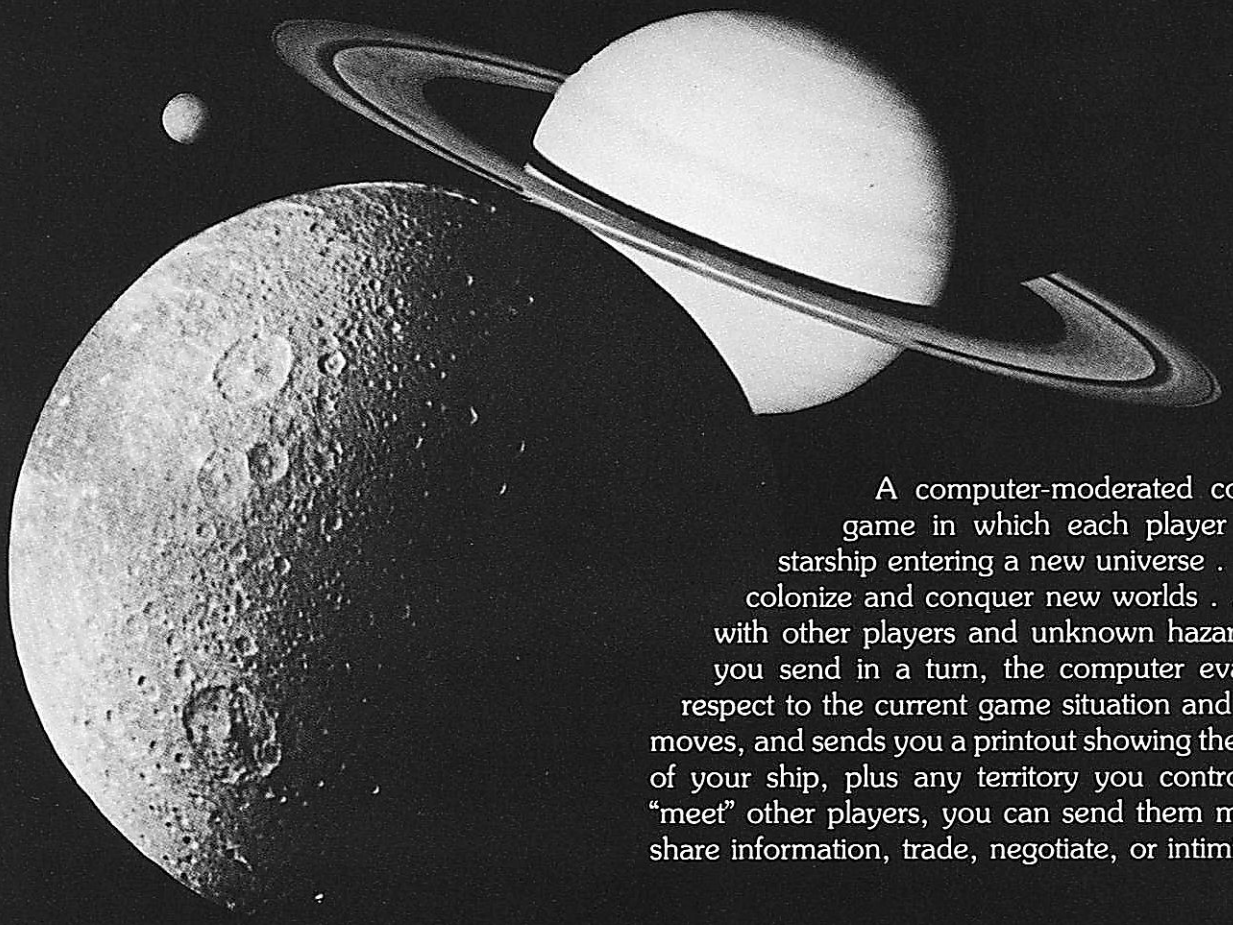
Columbus, OH — COGACON '84, Oct. 20-21. Gaming con on the Ohio State campus. Contact Paul T. Riegel, c/o War Game Designs, 6119 East Main St. #202, Columbus, OH 43213.

Amherst, MA — U-MASS CON, Dec. 1-2. Gaming convention on the University of Massachusetts campus. Contact U-Mass Con, U-Mass Grenadier Society, Box 117, Amherst, MA 01002.

Seattle, WA — RUSTYCON II, Jan. 18-20, 1985. SF con with some gaming. Contact Rustycon, Box 47132, Seattle, WA 98146.

Houston, TX — CONTEX II, Feb. 15-17, 1985. SF con with some gaming. Marion Zimmer Bradley is Guest of Honor. Contact CONTEX II, c/o Friends of Fandom, P.O. Box 772473, Houston, TX 77215.

UNIVERSE III



A computer-moderated correspondence game in which each player commands a starship entering a new universe . . . to explore, colonize and conquer new worlds . . . contending with other players and unknown hazards! Each time you send in a turn, the computer evaluates it with respect to the current game situation and other players' moves, and sends you a printout showing the current status of your ship, plus any territory you control. When you "meet" other players, you can send them messages – to share information, trade, negotiate, or intimidate.

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SIMPLICITY – No complicated "codes" to learn – you tell us in plain English what you want to do and we send you the results!

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NO DEADLINES – Since you set your own "turn length," you can't miss a turn!

NO EXTRA CHARGES – Our fee is $3.50 per ship or colony turn. We don't tack on extra fees for combat.

NO BIG DEPOSITS – Our entry fee is only $11.00, which covers a setup for one ship, a copy of the rulebook, and your first two turns.

UNIVERSE III is waiting for you. Your starship will be assigned as soon as you send your name, address, and entry fee to:

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BUG-EYED MONSTERS

They Want Our Women!

On silent grav sleds, the alien creatures slide through the forest, readying their lasers and stunners, drooling slightly in anticipation. They choose their first target: a little clapboard house nestled in the woods above town. They attack. The sounds of lasers and stunners are soon met by cries of fear and rage. Wild with lust, they fail to notice when one human makes it to a car and careens away to rouse the citizenry of the small town against the alien threat.

Ugly, slobbering, bug-eyed monsters! They land in remote American towns and make off with women.

BUG-EYED MONSTERS is the new West End release by Greg Costikyan, designer of the successful *Creature That Ate Sheboygan.*™ In this game, Greg returns to the "Creature" genre, bringing a flying saucer with menacing monsters to the quiet remote American town of Freedom, New Hampshire.

One player, as the monster, must attempt to kidnap the earthling women (the most beautiful in the universe). The other player must rally the citizens of the town to stop the repulsive invaders and save his womenfolk from a fate worse then death.

A special "Aliens Kidnap Presidential Hopeful" scenario is also provided. Dwight Eisenhower, campaigning for the New Hampshire primary, along with an entourage of state troopers and secret service men, is surprised by a party of bug-eyed monsters. Will they kidnap America's war hero?

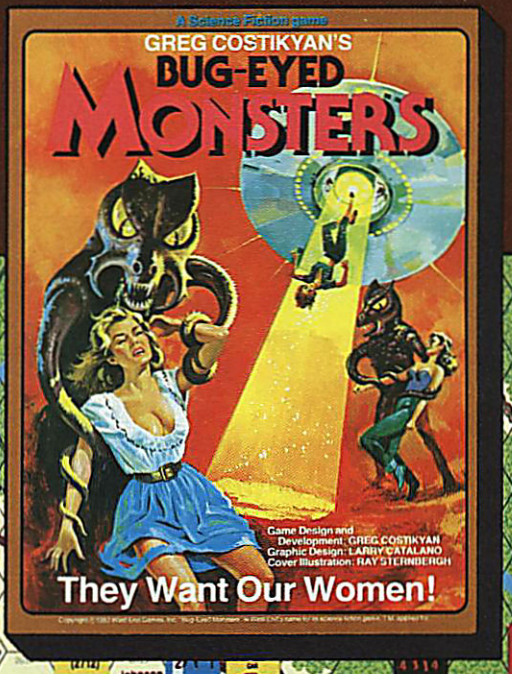
A simple but elegant game system with clear brief rules makes BUG-EYED MONSTERS a good introduction to adventure gaming, but its subject and smooth play will appeal to the hardcore gamer as well.

THE DESIGNER

Greg Costikyan is the designer of nine published games, including THE CREATURE THAT ATE SHEBOYGAN,™ SWORDS AND SORCERY,™ DEATH MAZE,™ RETURN OF THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT,™ and TRAIL BLAZER.™

The above titles are all the trademarks of TSR Inc. with the exception of TRAIL BLAZER which is the trademark of Metagaming.

- one 22″ x 17″ game map
- 160 full-color, back-printed precision die cut 5/8″ counters.
- one 8-page rules booklet
- two dice and full-color game box (1″ wide bookshelf size box)



WEST END GAMES

Complexity: Low
Solitaire Suitability: Low
Players: Two
Game Scale: Individual Person
Playing Time: An hour or less for experienced gamers